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THE SECRET DISPATCH;

OR,

THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN BALGONIE.

BY
JAMES GRANT,

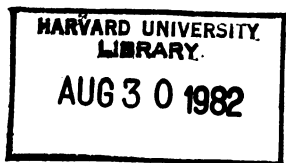
AUTHOR OF
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PREFACE.

I NEED scarcely inform the reader of history, that most of the events narrated in the subsequent pages actually occurred in the manner stated; and I have done much to soften, or subdue, the actual barbarity of the story, though such barbarity was consonant enough to the days of her, whose "lust of power and contempt of all moral restraint" won her the name of "the Semiramis of the North."

For the betrothal of the young Lieutenant of the Valikolutz Infantry to his cousin, it may be mentioned that a dispensation was necessary, as the Russian Church—like the Catholic—forbids all marriages within four degrees of relationship.

As stated in the text, the little song of the gipsy is one of many current enough in Russia, where the destruction of the Crescent is always fondly predicted; but never so confidently as

PREFACE.

during our late Crimean War : and even at this very time, an aged Muscovite, named Alexis Alexandrovitch, after a seclusion of many years in the district of Samara, has come forth as a prophet on the same subject, and is now proceeding from place to place, like another Peter the Hermit, foretelling and preaching the downfall of "the sick man" at Stamboul, and the speedy substitution of the Russian Cross for the Turkish Crescent on the dome of St. Sophia.

26, DANUBE STREET, EDINBURGH.

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THE SECRET DISPATCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST TRAVELLER.

"HEAVEN aid me! where am I now—which way shall I turn—advance or retire?" exclaimed Balgonie, as his horse came plunging down almost on its knees, amid wild gorse and matted jungle.

A cold day in the middle of April had passed away; a pale and cheerless sun, that had cast no heat on the leafless scenery and the half-frozen marshes that border the Louga in Western Russia, had sunk, and the darkness of a stormy night came on rapidly. The keen blast of the north, that swept the arid scalps of the Dudenhof (the only range of hills that traverses the ancient Ingria), was bellowing through a gorge, where the Louga poured in foam upon its passage to the Gulf of Finland, between steep banks that were covered by gloomy pines, when the speaker, a mounted officer in Russian uniform, who seemed too surely to have lost his way, reined up a weary and mud-covered horse on the margin of the

stream, and by the light that yet lingered on the tops of the tall pines, and gilded faintly the metal-covered domes of a distant building on the opposite bank, looked hopelessly about him for the means of crossing the dangerous river.

“Where am I?” he repeated, almost despairingly; for, as Schiller sings in his “Song of the Bell,”—

“Man fears the kingly lion’s tread;
Man fears the tiger’s fangs of terror;
And still the dreadliest of the dread
Is man himself in error!”

Though clad in the uniform of the Russian Regiment of Smolensko, which was raised in the famous duchy of that name, the traveller was neither Muscovite nor Calmuck, Cossack nor Tartar, but a cool, wary, and determined young Briton, one of the many Scottish officers whom misfortune or ambition had drawn into the Russian service, both by sea and land, from the time of Peter the Great down to the beginning of the present century; for many Scottish officers served in the Russian fleet with Admiral Greig at the famous bombardment of Varna: and it was such volunteers as these that first taught the barbarous hordes of the growing empire the true science of war and the necessity for discipline.

The rider’s green uniform, faced with scarlet velvet and richly laced with gold, was covered by a thick grey pelisse (like our present patrol-jackets), trimmed with black wolf’s fur: he wore a scarlet forage cap with a square top, long

boots that came above the knee, and a Turkish sabre that had once armed a pasha of more tails than one.

"Swim the river I must," he muttered, after having traversed the valley in vain, looking for a bridge, boat, or raft of timber; "but, egad, death may be the penalty. Well," he added, with a gleam of ire in his dark grey eyes and a bitter smile on his lip, "there was a time, perhaps, when I little thought that I, Charlie Balgonie, would find a nameless grave in this land of timber, hemp, and salted hides, where caviare is a luxury, train-oil a liqueur, and the air of Siberia deemed healthy for all who have any absurd ideas of political freedom, or are silly enough to imagine that a man may be the lord of his own proper person."

To add to his troubles and discomfort, though the month was April—usually the most serene of the year in Russia—snow-flakes were beginning to fall, rendering yet greater the gloom of the gathering night.

"I was to have found a bridge here. Can that Livonian villain, Podatchkine, have deluded, and then left me to my fate?"

He knew that in his rear, the way by which he had come, lay half-frozen morasses, heathy wastes, and forests of spruce, larch, and silver-leaved firs—vast natural magazines for supplying all Europe with masts and spars—the haunt of the wolf and bear; he knew that to linger or to

return were worse than to advance, and that he must cross the stream and seek quarters and guidance at the château, the name of which was yet unknown to him.

This was, if possible, the worst season for passing the Louga, which is always deepest and most navigable in spring. It rises in the district of Novgorod; and, after traversing a country full of vast forests for more than 180 miles, falls into the Gulf of Finland.

Balgonie buttoned tightly his holster-flaps, hooked up his sabre, assured himself that an important dispatch with which he was entrusted was safe in an inner pocket, and prepared seriously for the perilous task of swimming his horse across the stream.

Again he looked anxiously at the château, the abode evidently of some wealthy noble or *boyar*. Its outline had almost disappeared in the increasing obscurity; the last faint gleams of the west had faded away on the onion-shaped roofs of its turrets, and a central dome of polished copper, which was cut into facets like the outside of a pine-apple (for there is much of the Oriental in the old Russian architecture); but lights were beginning to sparkle cheerfully through its double-sashed windows upon the feathery and the funeral-like foliage of the solemn pine woods.

Could those who were comfortably, perhaps luxuriously seated within, but know that there

was a poor human being on the eve, perhaps, of perishing helplessly amid the dark flow of that deep and roaring river!

"Courage, friend Charlie!" said the rider to himself; and then he hallooed loudly, as if to attract attention, but did so in vain. The night was becoming a very severe one; the flakes of snow fell thicker and thicker on the gusty and cutting blast.

"Ah! if I should perish here—such a fate!" thought he, shuddering. "Shall I be swept down this black and horrid stream, the Louga, to be cast a drowned corpse upon its banks, to be found stripped and buried by wondering but unpitying serfs and boors; or shall I be torn and mangled by bears and wolves; or borne even to the Gulf of Finland, far, far away, having thus an obscure and wretched fate, without winning the name I had hoped to gain—forgotten even by those who wronged me in Scotland, the land that never more shall be a home to me!"

He did not say all this aloud; but certainly some such painful surmises flashed upon him as he forced his snorting and reluctant horse, by a vigorous use of the spurs, through the thickly interwoven brushwood that grew on the bank of the river, the dull and monotonous rush of which, encumbered as it was by large pieces of ice, was sufficient to appal even a stouter heart than that of this young Scottish soldier of fortune.

With a brief invocation on his lips, he gave

his horse the reins and gored it with the rowels. A strong, active, and clean-limbed, but somewhat undersized animal from the steppes of the Ukraine, with a fierce and angry snort, it plunged into the torrent, and breasted the icy masses bravely.

The slippery fragments that glided past, struck at times both horse and rider, forcing them to swerve down the stream; others were dashed by the whirling eddies against the projecting pieces of rock or roots of old trees; but after twice nearly despairing of achieving the passage, and believing himself lost, his horse trod firmly on the opposite bank. It emerged, panting, snorting, dripping, and trembling in every fibre, from the flood, and then Captain Balgonie found that he had escaped with life, and had safely passed the swollen waters of the Louga!

Leading his sturdy little steed by the bridle and caressing it the while, he made his way up the opposite bank, guided only by the lights in the mansion (or castle); but he proceeded with extreme difficulty, for the underwood was thick and dense as that which grew round the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty; ere long, however, he reached a plateau, the border of a park or lawn, and saw the snow-whitened walls and turrets of the edifice towering before him.

Rising from a balustraded terrace, with an arched porte-cochère in front, the façade was square, and three storied, having a central dome

like an inverted punchbowl, and several little angular towers, tall and slender like minarets; these cut the sky-line, and were surrounded each by a broad cornice or gallery, and terminated by a bulbous-shaped roof, exactly like an onion with its acute end in the air.

The lights in its many windows, the red and yellow coloured curtains within, all indicated warmth and comfort; while with the snow flakes freezing on his sodden and saturated uniform, his limbs benumbed, and his teeth well-nigh chattering, Balgonie hastily led his horse under the portecochère, and applied his hand vigorously to the great brazen knocker on the front door.

It was speedily opened, and a white-bearded *doornick*, or porter, wearing a long flowing *shoubah*, or coat of fur, lined with red flannel, admitted him with many humble genuflections, at the same time summoning a groom to take charge of his horse.

By the bearing of these lackeys, one might almost have thought that the Captain had been expected, or was a friend of the family: but a uniform has ever been an all-powerful passport, and an epaulette the most mighty of all introductions in Russia, where everything is measured by a military standard; thus, in an incredibly short space of time, the wants of rider and horse were alike hospitably attended to.

CHAPTER II.

THE CASTLE OF LOUGA.

CAPTAIN BALGONIE, of the Regiment of Smolensko, soon found himself in a comfortable bed-chamber, where the genial glow of a *peitchka*, or Russian wall-stove, diffused warmth through his chilled frame, and where every current of the external atmosphere was carefully excluded by double window sashes, adorned with artificial flowers between.

When he chose to repose, a couch draped with snow-white curtains, and having a coverlet of the softest fur, awaited him ; and above it hung a little holy picture of the Byzantine school, a Holy Virgin, with a halo of shining metal in the form of a horse-shoe round her head, if he chose to be devout and offer up a prayer.

A valet, after supplying him with hot coffee and a good dram of *vodka* (which somewhat reminded him of his native "mountain dew"), said that the Count, his master, would rejoice to have the pleasure of the visitor's society, after he had made a suitable toilet, and exchanged his wet uniform for a luxurious robe-de-chambre, in the pocket of

which he took especial care to secure his dispatch unseen.

Hospitality such as this, was not merely then a characteristic of the people, but was the result, perhaps, of a meagre population, and the absence of inns; thus the arrival of a stranger, especially an officer on duty, at this Russian mansion, created little or no surprise among its inmates.

He was ushered into the presence of Count Mierowitz, whose name at once inspired him with confidence and satisfaction; for, by one of those singular coincidences "which novelists dare not use in fiction, but which occur daily in actual and matter-of-fact life," he had arrived at a mansion where he was not altogether unknown.

"I have to apologise to your High Excellency for this apparent intrusion," said he; "but I have been misled or abandoned by my guide. I am Captain Balgonie, of the Regiment of Smolensko, and have the good fortune to number among my friends your son, Lieutenant Basil Mierowitz, the senior subaltern of my company."

"For Basil's sake, not less than your own, Captain, are you most welcome to the Castle of Louga," replied the Count, lifting and laying aside his cap.

He was a man well on in years; his stature was not great, neither was his presence dignified; he stooped a little and was thick set, with a venerable beard, undefiled by steel; for, like a

true old Muscovite, he contended that man was made in the image of God, and should neither be cut or carved upon. His eyebrows were white, but his eyes were dark, keen, quick, and expressed a spirit of ready impulse, for laughter or for ferocity—one, who by turns could be suave or irritable, especially when under the influence of wine, which generally made him fierce and stupid; for never, in all his life, had he suffered control or had his will disputed.

His silver hair was simply tied behind with a black ribbon; in his hand he carried a little cap of black wolf's fur, adorned by rudely set jewels; he wore a queerly cut coat of dark red cloth trimmed with fur, and wore breeches of the same stuff, and lacked but a dagger and pistols with brass Turkish butts at his girdle, to seem what he really was, in disposition and character, a type of the boyar of the old school, who preferred quass to champagne, ate his pancakes with caviare, and was proud of being a specimen of the old Russian noble, as he existed in the time of Peter the Great, when his class first united some of the vices and luxuries of Western Europe to their native lawlessness and hardy ferocity.

Such was Count Mierowitz.

"When did you last see my son?" he asked, in tone more of authority than of anxious inquiry.

"Some three months since, Excellency: he has been detached on the Livonian frontier."

"And you, Captain—"

I am proceeding on urgent imperial service from Novgorod where my regiment is stationed in the old palace of the Czars."

"To whither?"

"Schlusselburg."

The host changed countenance and almost manifested signs of discomposure on hearing of that formidable fortress and prison—the veritable Bastille of St. Petersburg, and he said :

"A name to shudder at—by St. Nicholas it is!"

"And, but for the feather in the wax of my dispatch," resumed Balgonie (showing a red government seal in which a piece of feather twitched from a pen was inserted, the usual Russian emblem of *speed*), "I had not, perhaps, tempted the dangers of the Louga, but sought a billet on the other side, if such could be found."

"You know not, perhaps, that my woods are full of wolves; but this is not the way to St. Petersburg."

"Yet I was so directed, Excellency."

"You have been misled, and are only some seventy versts or so from the place you have left."

"You amaze me, Count," exclaimed the perplexed Captain; for in the Russian service, an error becomes a crime.

"Captain, you should have gone by Gori, Oustensk, Spask, and so on."

"That devil of a Podatchkine, an orderly of General Weymarn, who sent him specially with me, has either deluded or abandoned me."

“Yet we must thank your Podatchkine, in so far that he has procured us the pleasure of your society in this lonely place—my daughter and my niece, Captain Ivanovitch Balgonie,” continued the Count, introducing two young ladies who came through the curtains of a species of boudoir, “Natalie and Mariolizza Usakoff. Our visitor, Natalie, is that Ivanovitch Balgonie of whom Basil has spoken so much and so kindly.”

Without being a vain man, Balgonie felt at that moment considerable satisfaction in the conviction that he was—as his glass had often informed him—decidedly a good-looking young fellow, with regular features, fine dark eyes, curling brown hair, and a smart moustache; for Natalie Mierowna, like her cousin Mariolizza, was one of the most attractive women at the dangerous Court of the Empress Catharine II.; for it was during her reign that the story and the atrocities we have unfortunately to record took place; when among us, in more civilised Britain, the grandfather of her present Majesty, old George III., was king, and the arts of peace and war grew side by side.

“The friend and comrade of my brother Basil is welcome,” said Natalie, presenting her hands (very tiny and delicate they were) to Balgonie, who bowed and touched them lightly with his lips; “he has often written to us concerning you and your adventures together in Silesia.”

"I am but too fortunate to be remembered thus."

"Nay," rejoined Natalie, "we could scarcely forget that daring act of yours, which won you the rank you hold at present. Ah, Basil told us all about that when he was last here," she added, with a beautiful smile, of which she knew that many had already felt the power.

"You mean my reconnoitring the enemy's position and avoiding being taken by them?"

"Yes, pray tell me about it?" said Mario: lizza, her blue eyes dilating with pleasure; "my brother was there too—Apollo Usakoff, a lieutenant in the Regiment of Valikolutz."

"It was a very simple matter," replied Balgonie, bowing to each of the cousins, and not sorry to have a good personal anecdote to relate of himself, one which was certain to make him appear to advantage in the estimation of two very attractive women. "It was only a *ruse de guerre*, and occurred when our Regiment of Smolensko was with the combined armies in Silesia, and before the King of Prussia attacked Count Daun at the Heights of Buckersdorff. An exact account of the Austrian position was required by our general, who had not then received the orders of the Empress to fall back upon the Russian frontier. The task was one of extreme peril; so I being a soldier of fortune, having all to win, and nothing to lose——"

"Save your life!" interrupted Natalia.

"One in my position, among a foreign army, must not value that too much," said the Captain, in a tone not untinged with melancholy.

"Well?"

"I volunteered for it, despite all that your son, Count, my friend could say to dissuade me. Well armed, at midnight, I set out upon my solitary mission, unattended and alone, without relinquishing my uniform; for if taken prisoner when otherwise attired, I would infallibly be hanged as a spy; but ere long I found, that in such a dress, there were insuperable difficulties to making the reconnoissance required.

"At the cottage of a Silesian boor, near the base of the Eulanbirge (or mountain of the owls), I stopped to make some inquiries. The fellow proved to be partially tipsy; the contents of my pocket-flask, potent vodka, completed his happy condition, and after a few jests I prevailed upon him to change dresses with me. He donned the green coat, epaulettes, and boots of the Regiment of Smolensko; I, the ample canvas caftan and girdle of a Silesian boor,—a fur cap, and a visage daubed with grime, completed my costume. Thus attired, and retaining only my pistols, I reconnoitred safely and unheeded the Austrian position, noting the defences, trenches, fascine batteries, cannon, and general disposition; but I had a narrow escape, for when returning to the cottage of my new friend the boor, a party of Count Daun's Imperial Cuirassiers, who had been patrolling

the Eulanbirge, overtook me, and at once perceiving I was not a Silesian; questioned me rather closely and curiously.

"I succeeded in passing myself off as a Pomeranian, and pointing to the cottage, told them that there was concealed an officer of the famous Regiment of Smolensko. They at once galloped off and surrounded it, while I stole away to a thicket, and climbed into a tree, from whence I could see the poor boor, clad in my uniform, and still labouring under the influence of his late debauch, dragged a prisoner—despite all his bewildered protestations and denials—towards the camp of Count Daun, while I, under cover of night, reached in safety the lines of the allies, and made my report to General Weymarn, then commanding our division of the army.

"It proved of no use to us, as we fell back next day; but it enabled our ally, the King of Prussia, to storm with signal success the Heights of Buckersdorff, to drive back Count Daun, and invest Schwiednitz. He offered me rank in his army; but I declined, on which the Empress sent me the commission of Captain in her Regiment of Smolensko, thus enabling me to rank as a noble of the ninth class."

"May you soon rank as one of the sixth," said the Count, patting the Captain on the shoulder frankly.

"Ah, Excellency, it may be long ere I become a colonel; yet," he added, almost as if talking to

himself, "when I got the letter of the Empress addressed to me, Carl Ivanovitch Hospodeen* Balgonie, I could not but smile at the thought of how such a title would have sounded in the ears of my good father, old John Balgonie, of that ilk!"

"Let me repeat that you are most welcome," said the Count, who totally failed to understand the meaning of the last remark; "and luckily you have arrived just as the ladies and I were about to proceed to the supper-table."

To Balgonie it had become apparent that each time he mentioned the name of the Empress, the proud pink nostrils of Natalie seemed to dilate, and that a decidedly dangerous expression glittered in her splendid dark eyes.

Natalie Mierowna, whose beauty had caused such jealousy at Moscow and St. Petersburg (two duels are spoken of concerning her), had ever shone brilliantly in the "follow-my-leader" kind of dance, now so well known among us as the Mazurka,—the old Sclavonian measure, in which all succeeding couples have to imitate the motions of the first; and the chief Russian peculiarity of the dance consists still in the circumstance of the ladies selecting their own partners—the brilliant Natalie, we say, having twice sportively, or in a spirit of coquettish bravado, chosen a handsome young aide-de-camp, whom the Empress was supposed to view with favour,

* Equivalent to Monsieur or Requite.

led to her abrupt exile from Court, and to the detaching of Captain Vlasief, of the Imperial Guards, to irksome and secluded duty at the state prison of Schlusselfburg. This unmerited affront filled her brother, Basil Mierowitz, with such fiery indignation, that but for the dread of compromising his whole family, he would have cast his commission at the feet of the imperious Catharine, and quitted the Russian army; but flight or exile must at once have followed the act.

As it was, though detached and distant on the Livonian frontier, he was now conceiving a scheme for vengeance, much more perilous to himself and to all concerned, and which actually aimed at the dethronement of the Empress Catharine!

CHAPTER III.

NATALIE.

THERE are few Russian ladies now, who do not speak with equal facility, German, French, and English; but Natalie Mierowna and her cousin were then each mistress of them all,—and this was in the comparatively barbarous time of Catharine II.

Thus their acquaintance with European literature enabled them to excel in an easy and well-supported conversation of which the old boyar, their kinsman, could make nothing; and which they could embellish by their wit and power of quotation, and with an exquisite *finesse d'esprit* peculiarly their own. When this dangerous charm was added to the great beauty of Natalie, she could not but prove a perilous acquaintance for the young Scottish wanderer.

Her loveliness was indeed great.

She was a large, showy, and snowy-skinned beauty, almost voluptuous yet very graceful in form, with fine dark eyes, that were dreamy or sparkling by turns as emotion moved her; long-lashed they were, and perhaps too heavily lidded. Her hair was of the darkest brown, almost black;

her lips were full, but flexible, small and pouting when in repose, almost too large when she smiled, which was frequently.

It was when she spoke of the Empress, that her white bosom heaved, and a fiery expression seemed to pervade her whole features. She said little, and that little was generally said with assumed gentleness or real reserve, for language cannot be too guarded in Russia; but her dark eyes flashed, her delicate nostrils dilated, her short upper lip quivered, she threw back her proud head, and more than once Balgonie saw her white hands clenched; for all the dove-like softness of her nature seemed to depart, when she thought of the affront that exile from Court had put upon her, and her whole family, even to delaying the marriage of her cousin Mariolizza to her brother Basil, to whom she was engaged—solemnly betrothed by a religious ceremony.

She took the arm of Balgonie, and led the way to the dining-room, which was lit by brilliant crystal girandoles, and heated, of course, by a peitchka, the greatest luxury of civilised life that can be found in a cold climate, and which warms a house more effectually than any grate of coals can do. Built on that side of the large, lofty, and magnificent room which was farthest from the windows, it was formed of solid stone, with several carved apertures, and lined with white shining porcelain; within it, blazed a constant fire of billets and faggots, under the care of the dvornick,

or house-porter, and these were furnished by the Count's serfs or woodsmen from the adjacent forests.

All made a sign of the cross in the Greek fashion, and seated themselves; but weary and exhausted by his long ride and recent immersion in a swollen and icy river, Balgonie found it almost impossible to partake of the supper that was pressed upon him: caviare on slices of bread to begin with,—“caviare from the roe of the sturgeons of the Don,” as the Count informed him,—roasted capon and jugged hare, dried figs and conserves, prunes, and *pastilla* of fruit and honey compounded, together with the champagne, Rhine wine, and vodka, in silver tankards and goblets of jewelled Venetian crystal.

The jaded traveller could make only a pretence of eating; but he could drink deeply, for he was athirst; and more than one foaming goblet of sparkling Moselle was filled for him, till he became giddy and confused. Were the fumes of the wine mounting to his head? What was the Count saying in an undertone? Was it of him that the cousins were talking in some strange language, and covertly exchanging smiles with their beautiful eyes? “Courage, Charlie,” thought he, “this is a bad beginning!”

Though people were not very particular as to a bumper more or less in those days anywhere, in Russia least of all, an emotion of shame came over the young Scottish officer; he felt his cheeks and

forehead burn, and he made a vigorous effort to rally his senses, but in vain : he heard the voices of Natalie and of Mariolizza ; but he knew not what they said or what he replied, for he felt as one in a half-waking dream. They were talking merrily, however, in French, which is always spoken well by the Russians ; perhaps because the tongue that can master Russ may achieve anything.

After a time he mustered sufficient energy and sense to beg that he might be permitted to retire, as he had his journey to resume betimes on the morrow ; and he was escorted to his chamber by the Count in person. Its four corners seemed to be in rapid pursuit of each other now, and the floor and the ceiling to be incessantly changing places ; then his senses reeled, and the light departed from his eyes. He found himself fainting.

The sudden and rapid journey from Novgorod, the lack of food and the toil he had undergone for one night and two entire days, while wandering with the treacherous Podatchkine, the crossing of the Louga, and the bruises he had unconsciously received from several pieces of floating ice, had all proved too much for his system, and brought on a relapse of an old camp fever from which he had suffered once when serving with the army in Silesia,—and in the morning he was delirious.

Though weak, bewildered, scared by the prospect of loitering thus when proceeding on urgent duty (for obedience and discipline become a second nature to the soldier), enduring a raging thirst

and a burning pang that shot with each pulsation through his brain, stiff in every joint and covered with livid bruises, he had still strength left as dawning day stole through the double sashes of his windows, to stagger from bed, and search for the dispatch, which, on the hazard of his life, he was to place in the hands of Bernikoff, the Governor of Schlusselburg.

He hurriedly, and with a tremor that increased, examined each of his pockets in succession, then his sabretasche, and lastly the pocket of the robe-de-chambre; but the dispatch—the dispatch of the Empress—entrusted to him as a chosen man by Lieutenant-General Weymarn was gone!

Lost, or abstracted, it was irretrievably *gone*!

Was he the victim of treachery or of a snare? Was it a dream that the voluptuous and beautiful Natalie, with her snowy skin, her dreamy eyes, and her fascinating smile, had been hovering about him—a dream or a reality?

Alas! he knew not; for again the walls and windows were whirling round him in wild career, and he sank on the floor insensible.

Poor Charlie Balgonie knew not that the morning on which he made this alarming discovery was that of the second day since his arrival at the Castle of Louga.

CHAPTER IV.

CORPORAL PODATCHKINE.

SCARCELY had Charlie Balgonie achieved the passage of the Louga, and, in the dark, forced his panting horse up the wooded bank towards the lighted windows of the castle, than his guide and orderly, Corporal Michail Podatchkine, who, for reasons which were his own, and which shall ultimately be explained, had decoyed him many, many versts to the southward of his proper route and then abandoned him, while he still cautiously followed, and watched him plunge into the perilous stream—watched him in the hope that he might perish in its icy current; Corporal Podatchkine, we say, had barely seen that the officer's safety was certain and assured, than he turned his horse's head, and with a hoarse malediction on his bearded mouth, rode away in an opposite direction.

The lighted windows of the Castle of Louga soon darkened and vanished in his rear; the snow-flakes came thicker and faster on the icy blast, whitening his round bearskin cap and fur shoubah or cloak, and the untrimmed mane of his shaggy little horse; but with his long lance slung

behind him, his knees up to his saddle-bow, and his fierce, keen eyes peering out the way before him, the amiable Podatchkine, who, though a Livonian by birth, had the honour to hold the rank of corporal in a corps of Cossacks, rode on through the dense fir forest as unerringly as if every tree therein had been planted by his own warlike hands.

Ere long, with a grunt of satisfaction, he struck upon a track that led to the right and left, and he unhesitatingly pursued the latter. There were then none of those verst-posts, about ten feet high or so, such as may now be found by the side of the Russian roads through the forests, or along the open steppe; but Podatchkine rode steadily on, pausing only now and then to unsling and grasp his spear, or give a fierce gleaming glance around him, while the nostrils of his thick snub-nose dilated, when a prolonged and melancholy howl, rising from the woody depths into the chill drear sky of night, announced that some wolf was rousing itself in its lair among the grass, or in its den beside the river.

Anon he came to a place where the forest was partially cleared, and there stood a little hut built of squared logs. The walls of this edifice were whitened artificially; but the roof was rendered whiter still by a coat of the fast-freezing snow. A single ray of smoky light streamed from the opening (which passed for a window) near the door, on which Podatchkine, without dismount-

ing, struck three blows with the butt of his lance.

"Nicholas Paulovitch," he exclaimed, "are you within?"

The door was soon unfastened, and thereat appeared a figure, not unlike an Esquimaux, bearing a pine torch. He was a man of great stature and muscular development, clad in a caftan of coarse, thick, and warm material, girt by a broad belt in which a long and rusty knife was stuck; he had on bark shoes and long leggings of sheepskin, which, like Bryan O'Linn's breeches, had "the skinny side out and the hairy side in;" and he cultivated one long lock of grizzled hair behind his right ear in the old fashion of the Black Cossacks; but this appendage was concealed by the hood and tippet of fur which he wore. This man, however, did not belong to any of the nomadic military tribes, but was a species of Russian gipsy, a half-breed.

He held up the pine torch, and its flaring light tipped with a lurid, weird, and uncertain glow his fierce, tawny, and repulsive visage, causing his cunning and almond-shaped eyes to gleam redly, like two carbuncles, from under their thick and impending brows, which were nearly as shaggy as the moustache that blended with his greasy and uncombed beard; and in the same light the head of Podatchkine's lance and the hafts of his sabre, dagger, and pistols glittered at times, being

the only bright parts of his remarkably dingy costume.

"Is it you, Michail Podatchkine—and *alone*?" he asked surlily.

"Yes; even so, alone. Dost think I have the evil eye about me that you stare so, Nicholas Paulovitch?"

"God forbid!" replied Nicholas with a shudder, for this idea is the grossest and the greatest of all Russian superstitions; "but I expected two—yourself and another."

"Who told you so?"

"Olga Paulowna, my sister, who yesterday saw you at Krejko."

"True, I remember. Now listen, old friend and comrade——"

"Hush, the girl is within and may hear you."

"Well," said Podatchkine, lowering his voice, while the other extinguished his torch, half closed the door of his hut, and drew nearer the speaker, "by order of General Weymarn, Governor of St. Petersburg, General of the Cavalry, Director-General of the Canals, Bridges, and Highways——"

"And the devil knows all what more!" said the other impatiently. "Well?"

"I am ordered to guide this Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, who is a stranger, to the gates of Schlusselfburg, as he bears to Bernikoff a dispatch of importance; but I have been promised a heavy sum——"

"Ah! how much say you?"

"I have said nothing yet."

"But you spoke of a heavy sum."

"Two hundred silver roubles."

"Two hundred silver roubles!" exclaimed Nicholas, opening his avaricious eyes with wonder, and then closing them again, so that they looked like two narrow slits.

"Yes, every *denusca*, if I, by fair means or by foul, prevent the delivery of that paper into the hands of old Bernikoff."

"He whose dagger tickled the throat of Peter III.: and by whom are you offered this, friend Podatchkine?"

"I can trust you: well, by the Lieutenant Apollo Usakoff."

"The grandson of the Hetman Mazeppa!"

"The same; and by Basil Mierowitz——"

"Well, and what the devil have I to do with all this?" growled the half-breed.

"Much: fifty roubles will be yours, Paulovitch, if you will assist me," said Podatchkine in a husky whisper.

"Let us talk over this: dismount, and come in."

"Nay, there is Olga Paulowna: then I have other work to do; but give me a drink, for I am sorely athirst."

The other speedily brought him a painted bowl full of foamy quass, which the Cossack Corporal, for so we may term him, drained to the dregs;

though it is a liquor, to any but a Russian, horrible as the water of Cocytus.

"Let us be wary, friend Podatchkine," said the woodman: "the knout is not an angel, but it teaches us to tell the truth alike of ourselves and of others."

Refreshed by his bitter draught, the Corporal shook the gathering snow-flakes from the sleeves of his fur shoubah, and resumed somewhat garrulously:

"My next instructions are, that the dispatch, which is from the Empress herself (whom God and our Lady of Kazan long preserve!), and which bears the imperial seal, shall never be delivered; but must be obtained by me for Basil Mierowitz and the Lieutenant Usakoff, now detached upon the Livonian frontier, and who both know as little as I care, that its bearer is actually their own dearest and most valued friend! I misled the Hospodeen Balgonie, lured him to the river's brink, and left him there, in the hope that he and his horse might become frozen on the steppe or in the forest, where I could rob him at ease; but the man seems made of iron, and, to my astonishment, I saw him swim the Louga. I thought all gone, he, the dispatch, and my 200 roubles, when he plunged his horse into the river; but he stoutly won the opposite bank, and has made his way straight to the dwelling of Count Mierowitz, where now, I doubt not, he is safely housed."

"It seems to me, friend Podatchkine, that you took a great deal of useless trouble when you had your dagger and pistols," said the other, suspiciously.

"Nay, if he was to perish thus, suspicion might too readily fall upon me, for he is a favourite officer of the Empress, and of Weymarn too. My plan is this: I may get the dispatch to-night in yonder castle of Count Mierowitz."

"And if not?"

"Then I shall again lure and mislead Balgonie, and bring him here in the night."

"What then?" asked the woodman doggedly.

"How dull we are, Paulovitch. We shall drug and drown him; thus shall he die without a wound. I will take back the dispatch to Novgorod; and you can carry the body on his horse to St. Petersburg, where a sum will be given you for finding it. The poor stranger, they will say, has perished amid our keen Russian frosts, and that will be all. Nicholas Paulovitch, the carcass will be well worth twenty roubles to thee."

"And thy fifty?"

"You shall receive when the affair is over, and when you come to me at Novgorod, where I am quartered."

"By the bones of my tribe, and by the sword that flames in the hand of the holy Michail, I am with you, Podatchkine!" exclaimed the half-breed with ferocious joy, mingling his gipsy

cant with that of the Russian church. Then they shook heartily their hard and dingy hands—hands that had wrought many a deed of merciless cruelty.

“And now, Paulovitch, give me a light for my pipe, and let me begone.”

A few minutes more and these worthy compatriots had separated.

Podatchkine rode somewhat leisurely to a ford that he knew of lower down the river, believing that in time the whole onus, and perhaps suspicion, of Balgonie's death (if it was necessary) might fall on the woodman, whom he had resolved to cheat of the promised fifty roubles if he could.

“He will play me false,” muttered Podatchkine. “Is not the dog a gipsy? Beware of the tamed wolf, of the baptized Jew, and the enemy who has made it up; why should I not delude him who will readily delude me?”

Our enterprising Corporal was correct in his estimate of Nicholas Paulovitch; for, at the same moment, that personage, while wrapped in his filthy sheepskin (caring nothing for the comfort of any other bed than the floor), was considering how he might drug and drown both the officer and his treacherous guide, sell both their bodies at the nearest military post, and, by taking the dispatch to Novgorod himself, obtain the entire reward offered for it by the Lieutenants Mierowitz and Usakoff, or still more, perhaps, by delivering it to the Empress!

There was a third person who had overheard the first savage plot, and who felt her heart stirred with pity and terror for Balgonie, who had given her a silver kopec at Krejko but yesterday, —the gipsy girl, Olga Paulowna, the sister of Nicholas Paulovitch; and she resolved to baffle both conspirators if she could.

It was in perfect ignorance of who might be the bearer of that dispatch (with the contents of which a spy had acquainted them) that the two officers, who were then engaged in an extensive and dangerous political and military conspiracy, contrived to have Podatchkine, in the character of a guide and orderly, sent upon the trail of one who was really their most valued friend and comrade; though, as a foreigner and soldier of fortune, they deemed it proper to keep him as yet in total ignorance of their daring hopes and plans.

CHAPTER V.

THE DAGGER OF BERNIKOFF.

It may now be necessary to afford the reader a little historical insight as to what it was that hinged on this important dispatch of the Scottish officer, Balgonie.

When the Emperor Peter II. died of small-pox (just on the eve of his marriage), closing a short reign of three years of stormy trouble and dark intrigue, the whole male issue of Peter the Great of Russia became extinct.

The Duke of Holstein, son of his eldest daughter, was entitled to the throne; but the Russians, for certain cogent political reasons, filled that perilous seat with Anne, Duchess of Courland, daughter of Ivan, Peter's eldest brother. Governed by her favourite Biron, on whom she bestowed the duchy of Courland, she broke through all the limits which growing civilisation had imposed upon the power of the Czars; she engaged in many useless wars, lost vast treasures and more than a hundred thousand men in strife with the Turks, and closing an inglorious reign, was succeeded by one who will shortly be introduced to the reader, Ivan Antonovitch, or

John IV., son of her niece, the Princess of Mechlenburg, an infant only six months old. This Princess sent Biron, the Regent, to the usual place of Muscovite seclusion, Siberia, and assumed the administratorship during the minority of her son.

This state of affairs was but of short duration when Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, having a strong party, seized the crown, banished the entire family of Mechlenburg, and deposing the infant monarch, Ivan IV., confined him for life a prisoner of state in the great Castle of Schlüsselburg, where he had been for twenty-three years, at the period when our narrative opens.

To mention him in conversation, and still more to possess a coin bearing his effigy, incurred the guilt and insured the punishment of treason! More than twenty years after the deposition of this transitory emperor, a German tradesman, who had worked long as a cabinet-maker at St. Petersburg, went to Cronstadt, intending then to embark for his native city, Lubeck. As it was not permitted to carry out of Russia above a certain quantity of specie, an officer of customs asked the German "what he had with him?" "Only a few roubles to pay for my passage," he replied; and on being commanded to show them, one was discovered having the effigy of Ivan IV.! In vain did the unhappy tradesman protest that he neither knew he had such a coin, nor from whom he had received it. Death was the penalty; but

his goods were confiscated, and he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment in the mines of Siberia.

The Empress Elizabeth died the victim of intemperance; and while poor Prince Ivan, an uncrowned emperor, a prisoner without a crime, was left to pine in the Castle of Schlusselfurg, the sceptre was given to the feeble and dissipated Peter III., the husband of the beautiful, voluptuous, and talented Catharine II., daughter of a petty prince, but descended from the ancient house of Servestan,—a woman whom, in three short months after their coronation, he contrived to disgust by his political innovations, and still more by his amatory inconstancy; so it was resolved to get rid of Peter, who was then in his thirty-fourth year.

Peter I. had nearly lost Russia by compelling the people to cut off the tails of their coats; and Peter III. became equally unpopular by ordering them to trim their vast beards, and by putting his troops in the Prussian uniform. Crowned heads should leave such matters to tailors and tonsors; but he certainly abolished the secret tribunal with its contingent horrors, and recalled many a poor exile from Siberia.

A party was formed for his dethronement; so one evening in July, 1762, when he was surrounded by his guard of Holsteiners, and amusing himself with his flower gardens (he was a great botanist), and with some of his beautiful mistresses at the palace of Orienbaum,—particularly

the Countess of Woronzow, to whose allurements he had abandoned himself,—the exasperated Empress prepared to strike a final blow for Russia and for herself.

Putting on a uniform of old Russian Guards belonging to her future favourite, Captain Vlasief, with the most coquettish grace, this young and beautiful, but in some respects terrible, woman borrowed from the nobles around her all the accessories of a complete military toilette : of Basil Mierowitz, a hat ; of Count Orloff, a scarf ; of Colonel Bernikoff, a belt ; of some one else, a sword. Over all, she wore the blue ribbon of the first order of the Empire, which her impolitic husband had laid aside for that of Prussia.

The drums beat to arms : in this strange guise she showed herself to the troops, who were now mustered to the number of twenty thousand men in the great square of St. Petersburg, where the sight of the uniform of the old guard, which had been forced to give place to Peter's cherished Holsteiners, raised bursts of acclamation, quite as much as the appearance of Catharine, who was then "in the full flower of her robust beauty, perfectly elegant in figure, and purely feminine from her shoulders to her feet, which were remarkably handsome, and of which she was very proud." Her nose was aquiline, her eyes blue with black lashes, and her hair, a brilliant auburn, was curling on her shoulders. Thus has an eyewitness described her.

The regiments began to file off against the Emperor, and little knowing the end of the expedition, among the troops on this night marched Charlie Balgonie, with the colours of the Regiment of Smolensko on his shoulder.

Everywhere the rebellious Empress was received with enthusiasm, and the Great Chancellor Woroslaff, who was sent against her, was among the first to join her party.

The Emperor, abandoning his flowers and his fair ones, fled to his yacht or galley, which was rowed to Cronstadt, of which his enemy, the High Admiral Talizine, had already made himself master. The imperial galley (relates M. Rulhière in his "*Histoire sur la Révolution de Russie*") came under the ramparts in the night, while the great alarm bells rung, the drums were beaten and scarlet rockets ascended in showers from the dark mass of the Castle of Kronslot; and then, all along the line of fortifications, Peter saw two hundred port-fires shedding their weird unearthly glare through the yawning embrasures upon the twilight sea and sky—each port-fire beside a loaded cannon—loaded against himself!

This was at ten o'clock; but ere the great oars of the galley were laid in, or the anchor dropped, a sentinel challenged:

"Who comes there?"

"His Imperial Majesty the Emperor," replied the Captain of the galley, who was standing on its gilded prow.

"There is no longer any Emperor!" was the stern reply of some one on the ramparts.

"'Tis false! I am here—I, Peter Antonovitch," said the Emperor, growing pale at these daring and terrible words, as he stood up and threw back his cloak to show himself and his well-known Prussian star, by the clear, lingering twilight of the northern evening.

"Sheer off," shouted the Admiral Talizine, "or, by our Lady of Kazan, I will fire on you!"

"We are going—give us but time," cried the Captain hopelessly, through his speaking-trumpet.

At that moment a thousand voices on the ramparts shouted on the still twilight air—

"Long live the Empress Catharine II.!"

On hearing this, Peter burst into tears, and fell back into the arms of his attendants, saying—

"The conspiracy is general—from the first days of my short reign I have seen it coming!"

He was soon after abandoned by all, even by his obnoxious Holstein Guards, who surrendered to the Regiments of Smolensko and Valikolutz; and then he was committed by his wife, prisoner of state, to the Castle of Robsch, in a solitary place, eighteen miles from St. Petersburg. Six days afterwards had only elapsed, when it was suggested that though young Ivan was still lingering a captive at Schlusselfburg, and some were not without hopes of replacing him on the throne, tranquillity could not be perfectly restored

while Peter lived, though lonely and abandoned now.

His wife's lovers and favourites came to this decision speedily; so late one afternoon, three horsemen arrived at the residence of the fallen Emperor. They were Count Orloff, who had in his breast a laced handkerchief of the Empress, the grim Colonel Bernikoff, and a Hospodeen or gentleman, who announced that they had come to sup with him; and, according to the Russian fashion, glasses of brandy were served round before they sat down.

In that given to the Emperor was poison.

Whether, adds the historian we quote, they were in haste to carry back their dark tidings, or whether the horror of the deed made them anxious to finish it, none can know; but to hasten their terrible work, they insisted on giving him another glass.

Already the subtle poison was diffusing itself through the vitals of the unhappy Emperor; and now, struck by the pallor of their faces and the ferocious expression of their eyes, he started back, refused the proffered glass, and despairingly summoned assistance.

They then flung themselves upon him, and Count Orloff, pulling from his breast the handkerchief he had concealed there, threw it over the mouth of Peter, to gag him and stifle his cries. He was dashed again and again to the floor, where he defended himself against his

assassins with all the fury that terror of death and despair could inspire.

Two young officers of the guard now rushed in, and, as the orders of all were to slay Peter without a wound, they knotted the handkerchief round his neck to strangle him, while the Count pressed his knees upon his breast.

Still the dying Emperor struggled so fearfully that the ferocious Bernikoff, losing all patience, plunged a dagger into his throat; and thus, poisoned, stabbed, and strangled, he expired without further resistance.

A few hours after this, pale, dishevelled, and covered with blood, dust, and perspiration, with torn garments and disturbed bearing, Count Orloff appeared before the Empress. "She arose in silence," says M. Rulhière, "and passed into an inner room, whither he followed her. Some minutes after, she called Count Panin, who was already named her minister, and informed him that the Emperor was dead, and consulted with him upon the mode of announcing his demise to the people."

It was given out that he had died a natural death.

The wound inflicted by Bernikoff's dagger was carefully sewed up; the orifice was neatly covered by a piece of gold-beater's skin; and the body, in an old green regimental coat, with four wax candles as a funeral state, was exposed for three days to the people. The Russians were permitted

to wear their beards; the Empress poured out her afflictions in a ukase, and offered up her prayers, as became a widow, in the church of our holy Lady of Kazan.

And it was in the service of this charming people,

“ ——— this new and polished nation,
Whose names want nothing but pronounciation,”

—a people, who, in the arts of peace, were little better than the Scots when James I. was butchered in the Black Friary at Perth, or the men of “Merry England” when her crook-backed Dick was smothering the royal babies in the Tower—that, by an adverse fate, our hero found himself a soldier of fortune, when, as before stated, old George III. was King of the British Isles, and “the first gentleman in Europe” was a sinless infant on his mother’s knee.

After Peter was laid in his grave, and Catharine was firmly seated on his throne, her conduct was cautious and judicious, and, as even her enemies admitted, at times magnanimous; yet frightful atrocities were committed during her reign when she degenerated into ferocity and debauchery.

The captivity of the young and innocent Ivan in Schlusselfburg, in charge of the unscrupulous Bernikoff, Captain Vlasfief, and a Lieutenant named Tschekin—three officers in whom Catharine had implicit reliance—seemed more hopeless

now than ever when the sceptre was in her firm grasp.

Now that Peter was disposed of, her only dread consisted in the chance of Ivan's escape; so his guards were doubled, and her orders to Bernikoff concerning him were to ensure his detention even by death if necessary: and it was concerning this very dread that Captain Charles Balgonie was proceeding with a dispatch from Novgorod, where Catharine, with some of her favourites and courtiers, was residing for a time in the ancient palace of the Czars.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PALATINE.

CORPORAL PODATCHKINE was an admirable specimen of his own type of Russian,—one who was more afraid of neglecting Lent than of murdering his fellow-being, especially if that fellow-being was a foreigner; “for,” saith M. L’Abbé Chappe at this time, “they do not reckon foreigners among the number of their brethren.”

His thick black scrubby hair was cut straight across the forehead in a line with the eyebrows, and at each side it hung perpendicularly down below the ears, in the old Russian and Mediæval fashion, and was, moreover, cut square across the neck behind, just as the English wore theirs in the days of Richard III.; and he kept alternately scratching and smoothing his rugged front, nervously and assiduously, when he removed his fur Cossack cap; and, full of affected concern, even to exhibiting tears in his small cunning eyes, presented himself, through the bribed auspices of the dvornick, to Natalie Mierowna next morning, and besought her to have him “conducted to the chamber of his brave, his beloved Captain, his comrade and brother, who was, he now

learned, seriously ill, helpless, and delirious,"—and, in fact, just as the cunning Corporal wished him to be.

There he found Balgonie, certainly too ill and weak either to recognise him or understand what he was about; so the faithful Cossack made a rapid and skilful investigation of all the officer's pockets, and especially his sabretasche, for the dispatch.

Not a vestige of it was to be found.

"What the devil can he have done with it?" muttered the bewildered Corporal, as he thought of his 200 silver roubles; "can he have lost it in the river, or swallowed it?"

The truth is, that Natalie Mierowna had her doubts about the fidelity of Podatchkine, and even of some of her own domestics, and aware of the risk run by the stranger if he lost a dispatch of the Empress, she had, prior to the introduction of the Corporal, secured the document, and at that moment it was hidden in her own fair bosom until she could secure it in a safer place.

In her bosom! Poor Natalie! Alas, she little knew its contents, and the horrors they were yet to produce!

Baffled thus in his attempt to secure it, there was no resource for the faithful warrior of the steppes now but to take up his quarters, which he was nothing loth to do, at the Castle of the Louga, and there quietly and comfortably to smoke his pipe by the kitchen stove; await the

recovery or the death, he cared not which, of Balgonie; and to concert further measures with the huge gipsy, Nicholas Paulovitch, whom he saw daily.

It was no feverish dream of Balgonie that Natalie Mierowna had been hovering about his bedside; for she and her cousin Mariolizza had been his especial nurses.

In less than three days the feverish delirium subsided, sense completely returned, and the young Captain appeared to be labouring only under a species of influenza. A cold, as we understand that homely but troublesome kind of ailment in foggy Britain, is almost unknown in the latitude of St. Petersburg. "It is," says Dr. Granville, "indigenous to England, and, above all, to London;" yet we fear Balgonie had a most unromantic and unmistakable cold, consequent on his immersion in the icy Louga, together with an aguish shivering, which rendered the quitting of his couch, and betaking himself to the saddle, as yet quite impossible.

Balgonie had an insatiable thirst: he had visions of iced champagne; but in lieu, got only tea-punch, if we may so call it, being tea in the fashion still taken by the Russians (who hold that milk spoils it), with a slice of lemon or preserved fruit; and as he got stronger, Katinki, a strapping Polish damsel with fine black eyes, who was Natalie's own particular follower, added thereto a dash of rum and then *tsvetochny*, or

flowery tea, with cakes, which the Captain seemed to relish all the more when he understood them to be made by the white hands of Natalie: an appreciation which showed a decided improvement in that young officer's health. But—

“My dispatch,” he frequently said aloud,—“I must begone with my dispatch!”

“Might it not be entrusted to the Corporal Podatchkine?” asked Natalie one morning, as she personally gave him his warm and soothing drink with her own hand, Katinka standing demurely by with a silver salver.

“Impossible, Hosphoza, for so I may call you: an officer alone can carry a dispatch of the Empress. Its contents are most urgent: this delay, over which I have no control, may be visited by royal disfavour, even punishment; and I fear that the air of Tobolsk or Irkutsk would ill suit a Scotsman's lungs, Natalie Mierowna.”

“Yet tarry here you must,” said she, with a smile, the beauty of which proved very bewildering: “the Louga is coated with ice this morning, but not so thick, however, that it might not be broken by throwing a five-kopec piece from here; but to travel yet would only kill you, Carl Ivanovitch, and cannot be thought of just now.”

Then as she glided away, with her beaming smile, her white hands and taper arms, her rustling dress of scarlet silk trimmed with snowy miniver, and all the sense of perfume that pervaded her, Balgonie sighed wearily yet pleasantly,

and half thought that beautiful figure a dream, as he turned on his soft and luxurious pillow, and marvelled whether his past or his present existence was the real one.

A captain in the ducal Regiment of Smolensko and not yet twenty-five! Some ten years ago, his future seemed to point to a very different course of life.

Far from Russian steppes and icy streams, their forests and barbarity, his mind had been wandering home to Britain's happier shore; and he might have said with the Bard who sang the "Course of Time,"—

"Nor do I of that Isle remember aught,
Of prospect more sublime and beautiful,
Than Scotia's northern battlement of hills,
Which first I from my father's house beheld,
At dawn of life; beloved in memory still,
And standard yet of rural imagery."

His story is a brief one, and not very startling, save for its rapid career of injustice.

Charles Balgonie, son of John Balgonie of that Ilk in Strathearn, had come into the world during that which was perhaps the most stupid, lifeless, and impoverished era of Scottish existence, the middle of the reign of George II.; when the country was without trade, energy, or enterprise, and when nothing flourished save that which prospers there more than ever even under the rule of her present Majesty, and will do so apparently unto the end of time,—gloomy fanaticism and canting hypocrisy: more among the laity cer-

tainly, who make a trade and cloak of outward religion, than among the clergy, who dare not be liberal, even if so disposed; for without a public and noisy exhibition of sanctity, few have ever had much chance of place or profit north of the Tweed.

Moreover, Charlie was born at a time when to be a Scotsman or an Irishman was almost a political crime in the eyes of their somewhat illiberal fellow-subjects, and when for either to attain eminence in the service of their native country was nearly an impossibility; and hence the Scots crowded to the armies and fleets of Russia and Holland, and the Irish to those of France and Spain.

By the early death of his parents, Charlie had been cast, in his extreme boyhood, upon the tender mercies of a bachelor uncle, Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie, a hard-hearted, grasping and avaricious merchant in Dundee—one who was a noisy exhibitor of religion, a fervent expounder of crooked texts, and, of course, an Elder of the Kirk; a great quoter of Scripture upon unnecessary occasions; one who always wore garments of sad-coloured broad cloth, with a spotless white cravat, and whose quavering voice and meek but cunning eyes were frequently uplifted against the enormities, the wickedness, and “the temptawtions and tribulawtions of this weary world;” and who was, moreover, a vehement despiser of that which he stigmatized as “its wretched dross,”

but which he left no means, fair or foul, untried to acquire.

In the lovely vale of Strathearn—one of the most exquisite tracts of verdant scenery in Scotland—stood the home of Charlie Balgonie. In his delirium, the present had fled, and the past returned. He had been a boy again at his father's knee—a child with his curly head nestling on his smiling mother's breast; again, in fancy, had her kisses rested on his cheek, and her soft voice lingered lovingly in his ear; again had he felt all that happiness, perfect trust, and security which the boy feels by his father's hearth, and the man, in after life, never more!

He heard not the hoarse Louga crashing down its ice-blocks to the Baltic Sea; but the gentle murmur of the Earn, flowing from the wooded hills of Comrie towards the broad blue bosom of the Tay—the Earn, where many a time and oft he had lured the brown trout and the speckled salmon from the deep, dark pools, near the old battle-cross of Dupplin and the Birks of Invermay. Again he had heard the leaves rustle pleasantly in the summer woods, where he had natted and birdnested when a boy; and he had seen, in a vivid dream, his glorious native valley where it narrows at Dunira; and far beyond, the blue ridges of the mighty Grampians, lifting their summits, alp on alp, to the clouds, eternal and unchanged as when the foiled legions of Julius Agricola fled along their slopes in rout and disorder.

On the death of his parents his small paternal estate of a few hundreds per annum would have become, as all might have supposed, his inheritance; but the relation before mentioned—the paternal uncle, Gamaliel, a man of the strictest probity, and of that which was equally valued in Scotland, extreme sanctimony; one who, on the funeral day, had shed abundance of tears at the uncertainty of life, and had excelled even the minister in prayer and “in warsling wi’ the diel” (*i.e.*, wrestling with Satan)—suddenly produced a will, by which, to the profound astonishment of all, the entire estate was left to him as a return for certain loans and sums advanced to the deceased, of which, however, no proof could be found; but it was a veritable death-bed will, written accurately by a notary, and duly signetted with the autograph of “John Balgonie of yt Ilk.”

Though tremulous and shaky,—strangely so,—and rather unlike the usual signature of the deceased laird, three men there were, accounted good, worthy, and religious men, who solemnly deposed to having seen “the hand of the dead man pen those four words.”

It was a case which made some noise in those days, because thirty-six hours after the alleged signature was given John Balgonie died.

The law of Scotland requires that, after framing and signing such a deed, the testator must have been able to go once at least to church or market. How it came to pass we know not

now, but the dispute, though without a basis, was brought before the Supreme Court by some friends of the orphan, for there were not a few persons in Strathearn who alleged that John Balgonie's hand had certainly traced the signature which was sworn to so solemnly as his,—but had done so after death: the pen being placed in the fingers of the corpse, which were guided by those of the pious and worthy merchant of Dundee, who wanted his nephew's little patrimony in aid of certain speculations of his own.

Pending a decision, the bereaved boy was removed to the busy town on Tay side, and was left to solace his sorrows at school, prior, as he supposed, to becoming a drudge in his affectionate uncle's counting-house, when the last of his slender inheritance had been frittered away in the fangs of the law.

One day—poor Charlie never forgot it—his worthy Uncle Gam returned from Edinburgh by the packet. The case had been decided against him, and the Court was about to name trustees to look after the estate of the orphan boy: so that boy learned long after. Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie was unusually grave, stern, and abstracted; but he deliberately seated himself at his desk, and while humming, as was his wont, a verse of a psalm, he penned a letter addressed to the captain of a vessel then lying in the harbour, and gave it to his nephew for immediate delivery, desiring him to wait for the answer.

Charlie remarked that Uncle Gam did not, according to his usual careful custom, keep any copy of this letter, and that it was written in a hand so unlike his usual penmanship as to be completely disguised.

The boy, then in his fifteenth year, started on his errand with alacrity. It was better to be out amid the bustle of the sunlighted quays, than drudging with a quill in the sombre merchant's office in a narrow gloomy alley of Dundee. He soon found the ship, which was moored at some distance from the shore, with her fore-topsails loose, and blue-peter flying at the fore, to indicate that she was ready for sea; yet Charlie had no suspicion of the trap into which he was running, or the cruel fate that awaited him.

The skipper, a rough, surly, and brutal-looking man, eyed the boy keenly, while tearing the letter into minute fragments, after he had perused it, with a grim smile of satisfaction. He then went to a locker, where he poured out a glass of something that seemed to be port-wine.

"Drink that, my lad," said he, "while I write an answer to your uncle."

Charlie, half afraid to refuse, though the skipper's bearing began to inspire him with distrust, drained the glass; but scarcely had he done so when the cabin seemed to be whirling round him; he thought that he was becoming sea-sick, and was in the act of staggering towards

the cabin stairs, when he was felled to the floor by a blow from the skipper's heavy hand—a blow dealt cruelly and unsparingly.

He recovered consciousness some time after, to find himself stiff, sore, and bloody from a wound in the temple, lying on deck in the moonlight, with some twenty-five other boys, several of whom were still in the same state of stupor or intoxication in which they had been brought on board. Others were loudly lamenting their parents and brothers or sisters they never more would see, and all were more or less covered with blows and bruises. To his horror and dismay, Charlie now found that the ship was at sea, and running between the dangerous reef known as the Bell Rock and the flat sandy shore of Barrie, and that, through the machinations of Uncle Gamaliel, he had been lured into the hands of one of the most notorious plantation-crimps that ever infested the Scottish coast, Captain Zachariah Coffin of New England, whose craft, a palatine ship, the *Piscatona*, was a letter of marque, carrying twelve six-pounders and fighting her own way.

Many miserable little fellows who had been lured to a certain den in Aberdeen, and there drugged, robbed, and manacled, were brought on board the palatine ship as she lay off Girdleness and burned three red lights, in the night, as a private and concerted signal with the crimps ashore: and some of these same crimps were

discovered, in after years, to have actually been the magistrates of the city!

After this, the *Piscatona* was hauled up, in order to go north about by Cape Wrath, having on board nearly fifty boys, who were to be sold as slaves to the highest bidder in Virginia, for nowhere was the infamous crime of kidnapping carried to a greater excess, even during the early years of George the Third's reign, than in the neighbourhood of the Granite City, where, in some instances, whole families disappeared, and their horror-stricken and bewildered parents died broken-hearted and insane.

Among the little Palatines—a name given by Americans to individuals who were thus kidnapped—some there were who pined and wept for home; and some who built castles in the air, and looked to America as a land of promise. Others there were who schemed out vengeance, and were sullen. Among the latter was our hero, who hoped yet to repay his wrongs on Uncle Gam, but meanwhile was knocked about mercilessly by the sullen skipper, and was so repeatedly rope's-ended by him, that he was often a mass of blood and bruises; and then, like a poor little victim, as he certainly was, Charlie would creep away into a corner, or skulk between the lee-carronades, where the salt spray flew over him, and mingled with the tears he wept so unavailingly, for those once tender and affectionate parents who were lying side by side

in their graves, in sunny Strathearn, far, far away.

Many times, after being beaten cruelly, he was deprived of food for hours and put in the bilboes, where the captain amused himself by hunting a savage dog upon him.

But his time of vengeance was coming !

Storms came on when the *Piscatona* entered the Pentland Firth ; and four days after Dunnet Head with its flinty brow, four hundred feet in height, had vanished into the wrack and mist astern, a sudden cry of fire caused every heart to thrill on board the lawless vessel.

Whether an act of treachery or not, it was impossible to ascertain ; but it had broken out near the ship's magazine, to which it communicated with frightful rapidity ; for suddenly, while the crew were all running fore and aft with buckets, a dreadful explosion seemed to rend the *Piscatona* in two. Half of the main-deck was blown away with two of the boats. A whirlwind of fragments flew in every direction ; and then the flames shot into the air in scorching volumes, which soon set the courses and top-gallant sails on fire.

Discipline, or such a system of it as Zachariah Coffin maintained on board, was totally at an end. Some of the crew lowered the only remaining boat, and fought like wild beasts for possession of it, knocking each other into the water without mercy. Captain Coffin cocked his pistols at the

gangway, shot one man dead, and swore with a dreadful oath that he would kill the next who dared to precede him; but he was struck from behind by an iron marline-spike, and falling together with his savage dog into the flaming gulf that yawned amidships, was seen no more.

Some of the crew ultimately pushed off in the boat; others sprang overboard and held on to spars and booms; but these and nearly all the little Palatines perished miserably, after being half scorched. Some were crushed to death by the falling yards and masts. Many held on to the fore and main chains, till these became so unbearably hot, that they had to drop off, with screams of despair, when they sank, faint, weary, and helpless, to the bottom at last.

How it all happened Charlie Balgonie never knew, but hours after the whole affair was over, and the detested *Piscatona* had burned down to her water-line and sunk, leaving all the sea around her discoloured and covered with floating pieces of charred wood and the buoyant parts of her cargo, he found himself adrift in the wide and stormy Pentland Firth; but wedged with comparative safety in a large fragment of the fore-top, to which, the yard being still attached by the sling, a certain amount of steadiness was given; yet his heart leaped painfully, each time, when the fragment of wreck rose on the summit of a green glassy wave, or went surging down into the dark and watery trough between.

To add to the terrors of his lonely situation, the sun had sunk amid gloomy purple clouds, and a rainy night was drawing on. Half drowned perhaps, the poor boy soon became faint and exhausted, and would seem to have dropped into a species of stupor ; for when roused by the sound of strange voices, he found himself close by a great and towering ship, which lay to, now right in the wind's eye with her main-yard aback, and her gunports and hammock nettings full of weatherbeaten faces, gazing at him with eagerness and curiosity in the twilight, while a boat was lowered from the davits and pulled steadily towards him by six sailors clad in dark green.

She proved to be a Russian 50-gun ship, the *Anne Ivanowna*, commanded by Thomas Mackenzie, one of the many Scottish admirals who have bravely carried the Russian flag in the Baltic and the Black Sea, the same officer who a few years after was to build the great harbour and forts of Sebastopol, at the little Tartar village then known as Actiare.

His youthful countryman became his *protégé*.

The worthy admiral sought to make a sailor of the rescued Palatine ; but the latter had seen quite enough of the sea while on board the *Piscatona*, and while he was clinging like a limpet or barnacle to the piece of drifting wreck ; so he became a soldier, and served under General Ochterlony, of Guynd, in the Regiment of Smolensko, where, as a cadet, his superior smartness, intelli-

gence and education, not less than his courage, soon distinguished him among his thick-pated Russian comrades : thus, in less than ten years, he became, as we find him, Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, the most trusted aide-de-camp of Lieutenant-General Weymarn, Commander-in-Chief of the City and District of St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOLDIER OF THE CZARINA.

"You can never know, Ivanovitch Balgonie, how much I pitied you—"

"You, lady?" was the joyous response.

"That is, I and Mariolizza," said Natalie Mierowna, slightly blushing (the Russians always speak thus, putting the personal pronoun first), "when we found you sunk on a fever-bed, in a foreign land, so far from your country, your friends, your mother, perhaps; for you are young enough, I think, to miss her still, at such a time, although a soldier."

"Far indeed, in many ways!" replied Balgonie, with a bitter smile, as he thought of Uncle Gam and the *Palatine* ship, or perhaps it was illness that had weakened him. "I have a country to which more than probably I shall never return; but father, mother, or friends, I have none there: all who loved me once, have gone to the silent grave before me."

"All?"

"Yes, lady."

"But you are making many friends in Russia," said Mariolizza, cheerfully: "there are my cousin,

Basil Mierowitz and my brother Apollo Usakoff, who both, I know, love you as a brother."

"True; and most grateful am I to them for their regard, for both are polished gentlemen. I have old General Weymarn, too, though I know not what he will think of this delay in delivering the Imperial dispatch."

"Alas, that most tiresome dispatch!" exclaimed Natalie; "but I forget," she added, with a curl of her short upper lip, "those who proceed on the errands of the Empress Catharine, would need seven-league boots, or the carpet of the prince in the fairy tale, which transported the owner at a wish."

"Hush, cousin," said Mariolizza, glancing timidly round: but no one was near save Corporal Podatchkine, who was stolidly smoking a huge pipe at a little distance on the terrace, when this conversation took place two days after Balgonie became convalescent, and fully a week since the night of peril on which he swam the Louga.

"I cannot describe to you, ladies, the relief that came to my mind on discovering that it had neither been lost nor stolen, but was safe—"

"In Natalie's bosom!" said Mariolizza, laughing.

"Certainly the last place, where, for her own sake, I would place a dispatch of the widow of Peter III.," responded the other, haughtily; but Balgonie felt his heart beat quicker as

she spoke. Her voice was sweet and low, and had a wonderful chord in it.

The day was mild and beautiful, and truly an April one. The last of the ice had disappeared from the river; not a flake of snow was visible among the woods or on the distant hills; and the bright sun of noon shone clearly and brilliantly from a deep-blue sky flecked by floating masses of white cloud, and cast across the bosom of the Louga the shadows of the great fir trees that spread like a sea of solemn cones for miles along its banks; and amid that woody sea, the most striking feature was a white-walled monastery with its "golden-headed church" and all its metal cupolas glittering in the sunshine.

As they promenaded on the gravelled terrace that lay before the Count's residence, Balgonie could see the domains of Mierowitz that lay for miles around: the patrimonial village of the Count, nestling among the coppice, containing a dozen or so of stone houses, and double that number of quaint tumble-down edifices of wood, and a church with a little gilt cupola, where his serfs said their prayers, and thanked God and him for permission to live and breathe, and to hoard their roubles in secret—for wealth in a serf was a sure source of misery, extortion, and perhaps of torture, if discovered.

In the immediate foreground were wharves, where the wood for masts and spars from his forests were launched, and formed into great

rafts for conveyance to the Gulf of Finland. The din of axes and the crash of falling timber, with the cheerful voices of the woodmen and labourers, were heard rising from the echoing woods, as they lopped and trimmed the giant pines for conveyance to the Baltic coast; for his forest trees were one of the chief sources of revenue to Count Mierowitz.

"Your father's mansion is indeed a noble one!" said Balgonie, who after surveying the landscape from the terrace, ran his eyes over the façade of the castle, as it was named, though by no means so well fortified as his patrimonial tower in Strathearn, which dated from the days of the Sixth James.

"So noble that the first Count of our name who built it, when Ivan Basilovitch—Ivan the Terrible—was Czar, put out the eyes of the architect, who was, of course, one of his serfs," said Natalie.

"For what reason?" asked Balgonie, starting.

"Lest he should repeat the work for another," replied Natalie; "but then the Count was a fierce soldier, who had served under Yermack in the conquest of Siberia. I fear you think us very barbarous, Captain Balgonie; but I can assure you, that even in the remote forests of Yakoutsch, on the banks of the Lena, there is more regard for human life and divine laws now, than existed when my father was a boy. He has, indeed, seen terrible things!"

Balgonie did not see much of the Count, who was generally occupied among his people, to whom he was alternately a source of reverence and of terror.

Though infinitely more civilised than the old Russian noble as described by Clarke, "unwashed, unshaven, eating raw turnip and drinking quass" (for according to the Doctor, in 1799, "raw turnips were handed about in slices in the first houses, on a silver salver, with brandy as a whet before dinner"), he was a fair average specimen of a fine old Muscovite gentleman "all of the olden time," who had a cat-o'-nine-tails always at hand; who generally unbuttoned his vest when the gold cup was brought, in which he drank his pink champagne or rare Hungarian wine, which he always had in equal plenty with his fiery vodka and bitter quass; who reckoned his silver roubles by sacksful, and his Sclavonian souls by thousands; and who, though by no means a bad fellow, as his imperious and outrageous class go in Russia, had still the somewhat czarish notion, that true nobility "means the privilege of being treated like a human being of intelligence and feeling, and of treating others as if they were nothing of the kind."

Scandal said that in his wild youth he had flogged his serfs to fight with his favourite bear, and flogged them again if they maltreated or hit Bruin too much: Balgonie certainly saw two or

three old serfs who had lost an ear in these combats. And when the Count took his afternoon nap, if a cock crowed in the village, a dog barked, or a cat mewed, the whole community were wont to tremble, when the stout dvornick, or house-porter, was seen to issue forth with his cat-o'-nine-tails in search of the proprietor.

A rich sash usually girt the waist of his old-fashioned tunic, which was of fine cloth, and trimmed with fur, broad or narrow according to the season; a square cap of crimson velvet, tasselled with gold and edged with ermine as white as his beard, was placed diagonally on his head, when he went abroad; and then he carried a long gold-headed cane, with the exact weight of which most of the shoulders in the neighbourhood were perfectly familiar. On holy festivals the breast of his best velvet coat was always covered by orders of the empire; a dozen of servants usually hovered about him when he dined; and he always went to church and confession in a clumsy old coach drawn by six white horses, three abreast, in honour of the Holy Trinity.

He was proud of being one of the old hereditary nobles, who are distinguished from the personal nobility by their right to possess serfs, and to whose earthly tyranny there was no limit, save the tomb. All the wretched serf possessed, even his wife, was the property of his lord. Fear of secret murder alone protected the latter species of pro-

perty; hence no wonder is it that the land is without a middle class. Even in the present century, Heber, in his Journal, mentions an instance of a Russian noble who, in his profane cruelty and lust of power, nailed a servant on a cross, for which he was only imprisoned in a monastery.

But in the character of Count Mierowitz, there was something of the rough and hardy country gentleman. He it was who caught with his own hands, and in his own forests by the Louga, the famous team of brown bears which, in the marriage procession of the late Empress Elizabeths' jester, drew that jocular personage and his bride, when the newly-wedded couple proceeded to the wonderful palace of ice (which was built on the frozen Neva), all the ornaments of which were icicles, and the appurtenances of which were also ice, even to the cannon which were fired, and did not burst.

"When Peter the Great came to the throne," said he, one day, "he found only two lawyers in all Russia; so, Captain Balgonie, he hung one as an example to the other. Ah, he was a truly great man, Peter! The English admire him solely because he tried to imitate them; but, for that very reason, we don't approve of many of his innovations. We look from the north and south sides of the same hedge."

It is not surprising that Charlie Balgonie preferred the society of two beautiful young girls to

that of a testy old boyar. To enhance their natural attractions and winning manners, they were always dressed in the most fashionable French *mode*, and wore the rich stuffs which came from Moscow, and even from China.

They and he had many topics in common, on which they could converse, after old Count Mierowitz had dined and dozed off to sleep—such as the theatre erected some years before at Yaroslaff, by Volkoff, whose troupe were now performing the tragedies of Soumorokoff at St. Petersburg, where a government theatre had just been erected by a ukase; while another ennobled the manager, Volkoff, who had died last year, after appearing at Moscow in *Zelmira*. Their knowledge of French and German opened up the best literature of Europe to the two cousins, which was fortunate; for at the period of our narrative, Russia had almost none, save some barbarous national songs, fabulous ecclesiastical records, and ferocious traditions: nor is she now much advanced in letters, though certainly, two months after publication, Charles Dickens may be read at Tobolsk—that terrible Tobolsk—where, as we have all read in our youth, Elizabeth wept such grateful tears on the bosom of her Smoloff.

Exiled from court, and secluded amid these forests by the Louga, a Russian lady had few resources for amusement then; so the unexpected visit of Captain Balgonie, with whose name and courage they were quite familiar, proved a most

welcome and fortunate circumstance to those two handsome girls, who were merely enduring life, or simply vegetating, in the great old mansion of Count Mierowitz.

But there was one topic in which our soldier of fortune could by no means agree with Natalie Mierowna—her bitter and most unwise hostility to the strongly-established power of the Empress, or, as she styled her, “the woman who now occupied the throne of Ivan;” a prince whom she viewed exactly as the Scottish Jacobites did “the Young Chevalier,” and a few old Frenchmen do at the present hour, “Henry V.,” the descendant of St. Louis. These sentiments, however, she had to utter in secret, or when none were by them; and when he gazed into her dark and beautiful eyes, so full of romantic enthusiasm and of dangerous light, he felt thankful that one so peerless and so perilous was not, at all events, his enemy.

She had accompanied the Empress on her celebrated pilgrimage to the ancient cathedral of Rostov, by the Lake of Nero, where the last of the Princes of Jaroslav was murdered in cold blood by Ivan the Terrible. Her expedition had taken place in the May of the preceding year. Catharine and her ladies walked ten versts afoot daily, and it was at the conclusion of this devotional journey that the final quarrel had taken place concerning the mazurka with the Aide-de-camp Vlasfief.

"That insult shall never be forgotten here!" said she, stamping a little foot, in a prettily-embroidered scarlet shoe, on the carpet of the drawing-room where, fortunately for herself, she was alone with Balgonie: "an insult to me—to us, who have the blood of Ruric the Varangian in our veins; and from her—this woman of Anhalt-Zerbst!"

Balgonie laughed; for the Ruric blood is to Russians what Captain John Smith's is to the Virginians, and the Norman element to the English.

"Yes," she continued, "'tis something novel, an insult to us, from this Catharine, misnamed the Great, who has enslaved all the Ukraine, and given men and women away by thousands, like herds of cattle, to her courtiers and her lovers!"

"Oh, be wary; I pray you, be wary, or speak in French!" said Balgonie imploringly, while laying his hand impressively—rather too impressively, we fear—upon hers, which was so delicately smooth and white, and was placed very temptingly within his reach, as they sat near each other for the purpose of conversing in low and confidential tones.

"The people are mere slaves under her rule," continued Natalie, lowering her voice but without withdrawing that coveted hand; perhaps she forgot it in her energy; but the omission made poor Charlie Balgonie's honest heart beat very fast indeed, and his colour came and went pain-

fully while her dark and glorious eyes were bent on his: "in her I behold only a usurper, who wields a knout in lieu of a sceptre, and who seats herself on a throne of human skulls; but the time is coming when all these things shall be altered!"

"And this time, Natalie Mierowna—what do you mean?" asked Balgonie, who had been long enough in Russia to feel a thrill of terror at words so wild and dangerous.

"When it comes you will learn; if the blow fails, woe unto those on whom it recoils! You may escape as a stranger; but I fear me, she will punish the whole Regiment of Smolensko—"

"My regiment—mine, say you?"

"Yes, yours, Hospodeen, even as Peter the Great did the Battalion of Strelitz, for adherence to his sister Sophia; and that we know to be one of the most sanguinary sacrifices on record, even in Russia."

"Heaven knows that is admitting a great deal; but you say either too much or too little to satisfy my curiosity: explain this coming peril—this mystery—to which you refer."

In her growing energy, Natalie's other hand was now clasped above his, and truly "the situation had its charm."

"Let us speak of it no more," said she, recollecting herself, and with a strange smile; "ere long you shall know all; but not now—not now. Alas! the best I can wish you, Ivanovitch

Balgonie, is, that your chance visit here may not also compromise you with Catharine."

They pressed each other's hands: it was done, perhaps, merely in the energy of conversation; but, to be brief, Balgonie found himself now hopelessly and helplessly in love with Natalie Mierowna.

Though both cousins were remarkable for their beauty—one blonde, the other dark—he had never for a moment wavered between them; for he had been, from the first moment he beheld her, irresistibly attracted by the brilliant and black-eyed Natalie. Besides, he knew well that Mariolizza was betrothed, or, as the Russians might justly phrase it, assigned away, to his friend and brother-officer, Basil Mierowitz.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN LOVE.

It was scarcely possible that the result of his visit could be otherwise than it had proved ; for Natalie was no common-place beauty, but one who had subdued the hearts of many more men than Charlie Balgonie—men, who now at Moscow and St. Petersburg were counting the days of her exile from the Court of Catharine : and when Charlie thought of her in after years, the calm repose of his days of convalescence, the aspect and furniture of his chamber in the old Castle of Louga, the genial glow of the peitchka, the double window sashes with their bright false flowers between, the Byzantine picture of the Holy Virgin with its shining metal halo, and the varnished panels of the walls, were all associated, as in a pleasant dream, with the dark and beautiful eyes, the round taper arms, the white and delicate hands on which so many diamonds glittered, the jetty hair that was twisted in massive braids (yet fell in ringlets too) round the superb head, — the graceful, floating, and statuesque figure of Natalie Mierowna, always so richly, even coquettishly attired. Natalie, so soft, so tender,

and so true, in all the relations of life and the amenities of society; and yet who could be so keen in her hate, so fiery in her political rancour, when thinking of her own injuries, and the terrible wrongs of the captive Ivan, whose adherent she had become.

Charlie Balgonie blessed the exile and choice of circumstances, all so sudden and unforeseen, which had cast him in her path. He loved her with all the passionate adoration so beautiful and winning a woman could inspire in a young and ardent heart; nor was it long before Natalie became aware of this, and was affected by the same emotion. There was one glance given, by which "each read and understood each other's soul." Lovers soon find means to comprehend each other, and Mariolizza, who speedily guessed their secret, which she certainly thought a dangerous one, found many excuses to leave them often together.

The long, long dream of his youth and early manhood,—the waking dream of many a lonely hour of reverie in the summer woods, by the sea-shore, or in the still hours of military duty, in camp and bivouac—a fair face that would smile on him,—a girl to love, and worship, and trust,—one who would trust and love him in return, was embodied at last; and in Natalie he saw this hitherto imaginary sphinx of whom he had been thinking, and for whom he had been waiting so long.

Her voice, her smile, her presence, seemed to fill the air he breathed with a new charm, that made every nerve thrill, investing the most simple and common wants of every-day life with sudden delights and joys; in short, and in common phraseology, the poor young man was "over head and ears in love."

The declaration of his passion, and Natalie's acceptance of it, came about just as others have done; and for three days after,—without looking the future confidently or inquiringly in the face,—Balgonie abandoned himself to the delight of his new and successful passion, and forgot all about the troublesome Empress, her pressing dispatch, and the terrors of Lieutenant-General Weymarn.

How could he think of such, when seated in the half-curtained alcove which opened off the drawing-room, on those calm April evenings; when the soft breeze that floated over the vast forests came laden with the odour of the spruce and fir boughs? Seated, with Natalie—in all the glory of her youth, her beauty, and the flush of her first love—by his side, often deftly and with rapid fingers weaving up the coils of her heavy black hair (which would come down, somehow, on these occasions); as she did so, displaying to greater advantage than ever the magnificent contour of her bust, her white shoulders, and taper arms, and adding even to the coquettish side glance of the half-veiled eye, the most splendid

of all her natural ornaments were those great, heavy loose braids on which the sunlight shone.

What was to be the future of all this ?

On the strong friendship of Basil Mierowitz he could fully rely ; but then Natalie was on bad terms with the vindictive Empress, and he, Balgonie, was a soldier, and, according to the rules of the Russian service, could not marry without permission from his colonel, who, at present, would not dare to accord it, circumstanced as the bride would be.

Marry ? What would the proud old Russian boyar say, or do, or think, when he heard that the penniless Scot—the mere adventurer—the soldier of fortune, was the accepted lover of his daughter, and that he had dared to lift his eyes to her otherwise than in the way of solemn and awful respect ?

If his High Excellency could have but peeped into the aforesaid alcove on some of the occasions referred to ! The mere fact of being a Scot would not have conveyed much to the mind of the Count. If to any unlettered Englishman of the present day, the names of Moldavia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Servia, Pomerania, Grodno, Mingrelia, and so forth, give but a vague idea of their whereabouts or history, it was perhaps worse in the Count's instance ; for so far as he, worthy man, was concerned, or for all he knew to the contrary, the Land of Cakes might have been in the flying island of Laputa.

"He would be furious, no doubt," thought Balgonie; "but he might soothe his troubled mind by flogging a few serfs, shooting a few brown bears, and draining sundry horns of quass."

Charlie had been present at more than one Russian marriage and betrothal, and the coolness of the ceremony had excited his astonishment and repugnance; for, in that country, those life-enduring arrangements are concluded by a mere match-maker, who makes the proposal, not to the girl, but to her father. He remembered particularly the case of Lieutenant Tschekin's espousal with the daughter of General Weymarn, who, having stated her dower to the go-between,—a thousand peasants or so,—the gallant subaltern was satisfied, and thus, as usual, the whole affair was settled without the taste or inclination of the young lady being consulted or considered. In Russia, the papa consents, and, according to some old custom, mamma pretends to object and weep.

"My daughter," said the General, "I have given you away in presence of my aide-de-camp."

"To one I know, father?" she asked.

"No."

"To whom, then?" she continued, perfectly undisturbed.

"One you shall soon know—here he comes; and this is thy bridegroom, daughter: art satisfied?"

The young lady, of course, declared she was satisfied. She and the Lieutenant placed their hands behind them, stretched out their necks, pouting their lips for a very frigid kiss, and the matter was soon concluded by a priest.

When Balgonie thought of the delicacy and gentleness of Natalie, and remembered the marriage of the Lieutenant Tschekin, he shrunk alike from the idea of seeing her subjected to the mummery of a Greek espousal and the vulgar horrors of a wedding feast and drinking bout *à la Russe*.

At last he began to wake from his dream, to find the stern necessity of departing; and, indeed, the snub-nosed Podatchkine, who was always hovering about, seemed as a perpetual reminder of the duty he was neglecting. The lovers were solemnly betrothed in secret,—Mariolizza was their only confidant,—and at present they could but arrange to wait until they could mutually confide in Basil Mierowitz, whom Natalie, ere long, expected to see. To write to each other, save by special messenger, was deemed at present unwise; but Balgonie would visit her as he returned again to Novgorod.

So the last evening they were to spend together came; and they were seated, wreathed in each other's arms, with Natalie's cheek resting on Balgonie's shoulder, in an embowered rustic seat, not far from the very place where he had so boldly crossed the swollen river on that eventful night.

Charlie's heart was full of sadness and bewilderment; he could but mutter and whisper of his love and their hopes, and again and again kiss Natalie on the cheek, on the lips and snowy neck, her hands and arms, while her tears flowed fast; for she had all the cooing tenderness of a ringdove now, and could only murmur from time to time:—

“Oh, Carl, Carl—my own Carl!” and so forth; and, like other young ladies similarly circumstanced on the eve of separation, believed herself to be the most miserable being in the world. But amid all this, she suddenly started and grew pale, on seeing a figure approach.

“See, Carl, see!” she exclaimed: “that horrible woman must be ominous of evil at such a time. Why has she been permitted to approach?”

Balgonie saw, at a little distance, only a Russian gipsy girl, possessed evidently of considerable personal attractions. She stood timidly, and irresolute whether to advance or retire; and bowed her head with great humility, while crossing her fine but dusky hands and arms upon her breast. In old age the Russian female gipsies are as remarkable for their extreme hideousness, as in youth they are famous for personal beauty; so this young girl was full of picturesque loveliness, and instead of being clothed in rags, as the wanderers of her race are elsewhere, her costume was brilliant in colours and rich in material. She had large glittering ear-rings; a gaudy kerchief bound her black tresses; and her rounded cheeks being

freely rouged, added to the wonderful lustre of her dark and dusky eyes, and to the generally theatrical character of her singular beauty and bearing.

“Oh!” resumed Natalie, with something of a shudder, “’tis Olga Paulowna: don’t let her speak to us in our parting hour, Carl, lest we be compelled to hear her sing, and that may perhaps bode evil. The dvornick, I understand, has thrice by dog and whip driven away this gipsy girl, who has come to the house again and again, ostensibly to seek alms, but doubtless only to steal or work mischief by her cunning; for though our Russian gipsies are not allowed to pitch their tents on any land without the express consent of the owner, this girl’s brother, Nicholas Paulovitch (as he calls himself), a half-blood, has permanently settled on our estate, somewhere in the forests, though he is despised and loathed by the peasantry, whom, doubtless, he loathes and hates most cordially in turn. I do wish she would go away without being ordered to do so.”

Little did Natalie know that those ill-requited visits of the poor gipsy girl had direct reference to the life and safety of him whose hand clasped hers so tenderly and confidingly.

“Faugh!” said Natalie, with increasing annoyance; “she is about to sing,—something naughty no doubt,—but her voice will soon summon the dvornick.”

Many of those female wanderers in Russia can

sing divinely ; and it is on record that even the great Catalani was so enchanted by the melodious voice of a gipsy girl at Moscow, that she took from her own shoulders a superb shawl, which had been given to her by the Empress, and placed it on those of the nomadic singer, "as a tribute from art to nature."

And Olga now began to sing with great sweetness one of those Russian songs, by which the gipsies, to flatter the people, sought to foretell the downfall of the Crescent ; and many such prophetic strains were current even during the war in the Crimea, as foreshadowing the fate of the "sick man" at Constantinople.

"Years after years shall roll,
Ages o'er ages glide,
Before the world's control
Shall check the Crescent's pride.
Banished from place to place,
Where'er the ocean's roar,
The mighty gipsy race,
Shall visit every shore.

"But when the hundredth year
Shall three times doubled be,
Then shall the end appear
Of all their slavery.
Then shall the warlike powers
From distant climes return,
Egypt again be ours,
While the Turkish domes shall burn !

"Again the Christian's cross
Shall over Stamboul wave,
And ruin, weeds, and moss,
Mark the last Sooltan's grave !
Again shall Christian bells
Ring where the Muezzins cry,
When across the Dardanelles
The Moslem hordes shall fly !

"So Egypt shall be freed,
Her tribes return once more,
Their flocks and herds to feed
Where their fathers dwelt of yore:
When all our warlike powers
From distant climes return,
Then Egypt shall be ours,
While the Turkish turrets burn!"

The last line ended in a shriek, with which a cry from Natalie mingled; for the cruel dvornick had been stealing through the thicket unperceived, and now bestowed a heavy lash across the tender shoulders of the cowering and shrinking girl; but ere he could repeat it, Balgonie sprang forward, arrested the descending whip, and then placing in the hand of the singer a few Livonian groschen, bade her hasten away, on which she departed, with tears of pain and gratitude, after pressing his fingers to her lips; and, in her terror and confusion, leaving her task undone—her warning of coming treachery untold.

"Oh, Carl!" said Natalie, laying her head again on Balgonie's breast, "dearest Carl, I am so glad she has gone without anathematizing us—or, or weaving some mischievous spell; for, smile as you may, I can't help fearing those people! I am a true Russian, and dread the evil eye!"

Richer by a lock of dark and silky hair and a diamond ring (both the objects of many a secret kiss), but leaving his heart behind him, in one swift hour after this little episode, Balgonie had departed to meet, and, for greater security, to travel in consort with, a caravan of a hundred

and fifty boors, who were conveying sugar from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

He was guided again by the sly Podatchkine, who had resolved to take especial good care that the said caravan should be avoided.

“God be with you, Hospodeen—God be with you—adieu,” said the old Count, lifting his square velvet cap courteously, as he bade farewell to his guest at the porte-cochère.

Balgonie so respectfully kissed the hands of Natalie and Mariolizza, that none could have detected a difference in his manner to either; and certainly none could have suspected that the tears of the former were yet wet upon his cheek—her kisses lingering on his lip, that he seemed to leave his soul upon her hand, and that the wrung hearts of both were swollen with concealed emotion.

“Uich!” thought Corporal Michail Podatchkine as he rode after the officer into the deep forest, “I’d as soon think of kissing the foot as the hand; who knows among what carrion either may have been stuck? By St. Nicholas, I would rather eat a sheep’s tail or a rump steak from an old troop mare than kiss either.”

Some hours after Balgonie’s departure, and when Natalie in the solitude of her own room was abandoned to tears and unavailing regrets, a trusted messenger from her brother arrived with a brief note, written so enigmatically that none save herself could have understood or deci-

phered it; but the spirit of it was briefly this :—

“All is arranged for freeing the prisoner of S. (chlusselburg) by a stratagem. A dispatch that may counteract, if not baffle our plans, and fatally compromise us all, has been sent by old Weymarn to St. Petersburg. I know not who the bearer is; but be assured of this, *he will never reach it alive*. We have set Podatchkine on his track, and he, worthy Livonian, for two hundred roubles, would skin his own father alive.”

After reading this pleasant epistle, little wonder is it that Natalie was found by Mariolizza, as the twilight deepened, half senseless upon her bed, cold, in tears, and utterly miserable.

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CHAPTER IX.

DELUDED.

A LOVER has occasionally been likened to a fool, as being a man possessed by one idea, his mistress. This was certainly somewhat of poor Charlie Balgonie's state of mind. He saw only the dark eyes, the half drooped lids, and the farewell glance of Natalie; so full of hidden and tender meaning; and while thinking of her and of her last words and promises, their mutual hopes of the future, based almost entirely on Basil, he fell an easy prey to the plans and schemes of the wily Corporal Podatchkine, who saw only his anticipated two hundred silver roubles; and who, knowing the country as well as if it had been every acre, rood, and verst his own property, led him on and on he knew not where; but, at all events, two hours after they should have met the caravan, they found themselves, to all appearance, lost in a dense forest of dark pine trees.

Failing the caravan, having now proceeded, as he believed, some twenty miles or so, Balgonie had thoughts of passing the night at the house of a friend of Count Mierowitz, a *duornin*, of whom he had been told by Mariolizza, who

laughingly assured him, that this personage was "a fine Russian gentleman of the old school, who beat his wife regularly every Thursday and Saturday with a whip of thongs," and was seldom sober.

Those duornins were country gentlemen, who held their lands by knights' service, and were bound to attend the Czar on horseback in time of war. Formerly it was sufficient to send a man well armed and mounted; but Peter the Great first compelled them or their sons to serve in person, if they could not pay for a substitute.

In short, though he knew it not, Balgonie had been for the last two hours riding merely in a wide circle, and, by the careful guidance of Podatchkine, was now not many miles from the hut of the gipsy woodman, Nicholas Paulovitch; and, consequently, he was much nearer the Castle of Louga than he had the least idea of.

On this night there was a glorious Aurora in the north, and full of his love, his own tender thoughts, and inspired by the beauty of the scene, it seemed to the somewhat provoked Podatchkine, that the dreaming Captain was quite disposed to pass the night where he was.

When the dense wood of stupendous pines opened into long vistas, the whole northern quarter of the sky could be seen, illuminated from the horizon to the zenith. Gloriously bright as the most brilliant phosphorus, masses of fire arose in the form of columns that waved, towered, and

shot into the air, with streaks of fainter light between. Anon they all blended and merged into each other with renewed grandeur, aslant, or radiating from a centre, like the sticks of a mighty fan. All that portion of the heavens seemed a mass of shining gold, rubies, and sapphires, with a wondrous light streaming over them, broadening, brightening, and deepening, then fading away, to flash forth again in greater beauty and glory, while, as if to enhance the magnificence of this illumination, many falling stars shot across it, leaving in their train sparkles of light, more brilliant even than the glory that blazed beyond. In black outline between, and in the immediate foreground, towered the dark and solemn pines, in solitude and silence.

Not a sound was heard but the occasional snort of their horses, or the cry of a distant wolf.

Balgonie was surmising whether Natalie would be surveying the beautiful natural illumination from her window, or from the terrace: he forgot that it was nothing new to her. Certainly it proved of little interest to Michail Podatchkine, who, under his thick beard, growled at the officer for loitering.

The Scottish islesmen call the streamers of the Aurora "the merry dancers;" but the Siberians name them "the raging host:" and Balgonie was reflecting what a relief their brilliance must prove to the lonely hunters, who at that very time were pursuing the white bear and the blue fox, far

beyond the Lena, and along the shores of the Icy Sea, when his attendant disturbed his reverie.

"Well, Michail," said he, in reply to some remark in which the Corporal, who saw nothing wonderful in the matter, urged that they should proceed, "we have missed the sugar caravan, and cannot discover the residence of the duornin I spoke of, so I am rather provoked with you."

"Oh, Excellency, who can withstand God or the Great Novgorod?" whined the fellow, using an old Russian proverb.

Jean Paul Richter says, "the more weakness, the more lying; force goes straight, but any cannon-ball with cavities in it goes crooked." Some such thought as this occurred to Balgonie, as he checked his horse, and half turning round, with a stern expression in his face, which the light in the north made sufficiently plain, he said:—

"Rascal! I fear you are deceiving me again!"

Hustled up on his saddle, rather than in it, with his knees on his holsters and his lance slung behind him, Podatchkine made many signs of the cross, and called on St. Sergius and all the other *moshtschi*, or saints of Russia, to bear witness that he was as innocent as a young bear of any such foul idea; but only begged that his Excellency would proceed, and assured him that the track they were on must assuredly bring them, ere long, to some woodman's dwelling.

At this time, such is the slavish influence of

superstition, that Podatchkine, for mere fellowship, kept close to the very man against whom he had formed the most fiendish schemes; for stories of the Wood Fairies,—of the *Leechie*, or Forest-demon, whose fangs tore the benighted asunder,—of the *Domovoi*, or mischievous Russian Brownie,—of the *Vodianoi*, or smiling River-spirit, who lured travellers to a watery doom,—of wolves and bears in ravening herds, came fast upon his memory; for the forest was growing denser, and the darkness deepened painfully after the Aurora faded away, and a few solitary stars alone glinted through the openings between the broad, flat, pendant branches of the intertwisted pines.

The silence of the night was now broken only by the whistling croak of the *valdchnep*, or great woodcock, as he darted from amid the black gloom of a pine tree, or the lighter shadow of the graceful, but, as yet, leafless birch; and the craven and clamorous anxiety that had been giving real pangs, and even qualms of conscience, to the superstitious Podatchkine began to subside, when the wood opened a little, a red light appeared, and they approached the cottage of Nicholas Paulovitch, the half-bred.

It was, as already stated, built of logs, squared by the hatchet outside and inside, and whitened by chalk: before it yawned a deep draw-well, with a bucket, handle, and winch.

"'Tis the cottage of a man I know. Here, Excellency, we can pass the night," said Podatch-

kine, leaping from his horse and dutifully taking Balgonie's bridle, as if to anticipate any proposition of proceeding further. "There is a shed behind where I shall stable our horses : Nicholas, I know, will make us welcome to his lodge."

In a few minutes more, Balgonie found himself seated in the cottage, the aspect of which struck him as being peculiarly comfortless, dingy, and squalid, as he viewed it by the light of a *loutchin*, or species of pine torch, which stood in a rusty iron holder on the rough deal table, whereon lay a pack of frayed and dog-eared cards.

On the walls were some rude images, stuck over with crumbs of black bread, which attracted the flies in summer and the dirt at all times. In a place of honour was a holy effigy, with some train oil flaring before it in a tin sconce, as a species of votive lamp ; for the proprietor affected religion quite as much as Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie did in a more civilised part of the world.

The furniture consisted of a few plain stools, and some very dirty bearskins spread on the floor in the corners, as beds ; and on the table was a pitcher of foaming and seething quass, with wooden bowls to drink it by.

Balgonie took in all these details at a glance.

How great would have been his surprise, if he had known that after riding so many miles, he was only a short distance from *her*, from Natalie, who was now weeping bitterly and sleeplessly on the bosom of her cousin for him, and for the fate

she dreaded, and yet had not the power to avert, or from which to save him.

In addition to Podatchkine and the host, Nicholas Paulovitch, who stood respectfully at a little distance from Balgonie, and was appraising the exact value of his costume, arms, and ornaments, even to Natalie's diamond ring, there was present another ill-visaged fellow, with a powerful figure, square shoulders, and giant beard, like every Russian of the lower order; eyes that were small and piercing, like those of a mouse; a long, fierce nose and jagged teeth, hair shorn off close above the eyebrows and brushed all down straight from the crown of his head, which in form resembled a cone or a pine-apple.

This barbarian, who was dressed chiefly in a shoubah of sheepskin, and had a small, but sharp, hatchet and dagger in his girdle, was a Stepniak, from a district where nothing like a town was ever seen or known, but whose aid and strength Paulovitch thought might be useful and necessary in the work he and Podatchkine had cut out for themselves in the night.

CHAPTER X.

THE CORPORAL IN HIS OWN TRAP.

BALGONIE was rather weary after his long and desultory ride by rough and unfrequented roads, chiefly devious forest paths ; he felt thirsty, and looked at the pitcher of quass.

“ Will his Excellency drink ? ” asked Nicholas Paulovitch, in his hoarse and husky voice.

Now as quass is simply a species of sour beer, made of rye and oatmeal, coloured by a red berry, and is generally the beverage by which the Russians wash down their coarse bread and salt, Balgonie declined : the Stepniak proposed to add thereto a dash of train oil ; but the suggestion made the young officer shudder.

“ I have fortunately one bottle of Rhine wine,” said the woodman, with a rapid and furtive glance at his comrades ; “ his Excellency will doubtless honour us by taking it with his supper, at least with such fare as the forest produces, a stewed rabbit or so.”

“ I thank you, good fellow. Where is this cottage situated ? ”

“ Situated,” repeated Nicholas, with a quick

and uneasy glance at the Corporal, fearing there might be some discrepancy in their information.

"Yes, in what part of the country?" said Podatchkine; "for we naturally wish to know."

"Near Velie."

"Then I am somewhere about forty versts from the Louga?"

"Yes, Excellency, precisely," replied the rascal.

"Hence, if my horse is fresh, I may reach Schlussemburg to-morrow?"

"Scarcely, as it lies fully a hundred versts beyond Velie," said Nicholas.

"Is the distance so great?" exclaimed Balgonie, little knowing that it was even more, and all unsuspecting of how these wretches were deluding him.*

"But, Excellency, we may prove more able guides than Michail Podatchkine," said the gipsy woodman; "for we—that is the Stepniak and I—must proceed to St. Petersburg to-morrow, on a little piece of business we shall have to perform together."

"Poor devils!" thought Podatchkine, "if you take his body to St. Petersburg, you will both be accused of murder and knouted, as sure as my name is Michail; so I shall save my fifty silver roubles."

* The cottage of those assassins is said to have been situated ten versts, or about eight miles distant from Louga on the road to Velie. *Vide* dispatch from General Weymarn to the Empress, dated 8th August, "concerning Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, a Scottish Captain in the Regiment of Smolensko."—*Utrecht Gazette*.

Even at the present day in Russia, few will venture to receive or meddle with a dead body, or attempt to succour a dying or a drowning person, in dread of the dangerous accusations and extortions of the police.

A sound, as of footsteps, and of something like a drinking vessel falling on the floor of an upper apartment, made the woodman start up with an oath of astonishment and alarm. He hurriedly applied a ladder to the trap which gave admission to this place, and ascended into it; but returned almost immediately to say, "there was no one there." The evident surprise and alarm of the three men at this trivial occurrence, is said to have been the first cause of exciting Balgonie's suspicion.

He glanced at the Stepniak, who sat silently observant in a corner, drinking his quass, with his feet resting against the rude peitchka, or stone stove, which was built into the log wall of the cottage, and when surveying his vast bulk and colossal stature, together with his singularly ferocious aspect, the reflection occurred to him, that he should have placed his pistols in his girdle instead of leaving them in the holsters of the saddle.

He was the reverse of timid; he was "brave even to rashness, and had faced death many times" (to quote General Weymarn) since his career of wandering began; but the idea certainly did flash upon his mind, that his situation

in that lonely forest had its perils, and that two men more repulsive in aspect and in bearing than the gipsy and Stepniak, he had never seen, even in Russia.

Was it some mysterious and intuitive sense of danger drawing near that made such thoughts pass through the steady mind of Balgonie?

He and Podatchkine were both armed, and even were these men outlaws, they would scarcely, he believed, dare to assault an officer on military duty; besides, the very name of Schlusselfburg, whither he was proceeding, carried a wholesome terror with it; so dismissing his casual suspicions, Charlie unbuckled his sword, and seated himself at the table, on which a cold supper of stewed rabbits and coarse rye bread was laid for the four who were present.

A platter was placed for a fifth person whom Nicholas remarked to Podatchkine in a growling tone was still abroad in the forest, or had not returned from some place which was named in a whisper.

With an affectation of extreme respect and courtesy, none of the three worthies would seat themselves at the table, until Balgonie specially invited and urged them in succession to do so.

The bottle of Rhine wine was produced from the apartment above and opened. The length of the cork and the dust on the bottle (wherever it came from originally) argued well of the contents, and two horns, one of which had a hand-

some silver rim, were placed for the Captain and the Corporal.

The former was rather surprised to find such a drinking vessel as this silver mounted cup in a place so squalid, and he was about to lift and examine it, when Nicholas Paulovitch, with almost nervous haste, filled it, and also that of the Corporal, to the brim.

To the surprise of Balgonie, the latter exhibited some undisguised alarm on seeing wine placed before *him*; it was an attention under all the circumstances he neither wished nor expected; and so he declined to drink of it, saying that he was "a true Russ, and would adhere to the quass."

"Nay, fear not, friend Michail," said the woodman, "'tis the best of Rhine wine. The cup with the silver mounting is of course for his Excellency the Hospodeen," he added with a quiet but grim significance, which the wily Cossack quite understood, so he drained the wine horn without further objection.

Soon after having supped, and imbibed his full share of the wine bottle, Balgonie expressed a desire for repose, as he wished to depart by day-break; but he had other reasons for retiring so early. He did not much relish the society of the gipsy, the Stepniak, and the Corporal of Cossacks; and he wished to indulge in reverie, to commune with himself, and let the current of his thoughts run undisturbed on Natalie and their adieux.

"This way, Excellency," said Nicholas, with alacrity, lifting the pine torch in its iron loutchin, and ushering him up the stair, a mere common ladder, and through the trap-door into the little apartment above, where his couch, composed merely of skins of the bear and sheep awaited him, and where he could see the dark forest and the occasional stars through a small window that gave light and air to the place, which was so limited in size, that it somewhat resembled a little cabin in a ship.

Left in this miserable den to his own reflections and to darkness—when Nicholas descended with the pine torch, carefully closed the trap-door and secured it on the lower side by a wooden bolt, moreover, softly removing the ladder—Charlie Balgonie placed his sword conveniently at hand, and cast himself upon the pile of skins that were to form his bed, and thought he had often fared worse in the bivouacs of Silesia and Bavaria.

"So—he is safe," said Nicholas Paulovitch, looking upward with a grin of savage satisfaction at the closed trap, as he replaced the loutchin on the table, and then closely scrutinised the Corporal, whose eyes had already become red and inflamed.

"Hush!" said Podatchkine, "take care."

"Why?" asked Nicholas, in a hoarse whisper.

"Because all may not be yet as you wish it, and in Russia sometimes the tongue flays the shoulders and cuts off the head."

"True," said the hitherto taciturn Stepniak, who was carefully feeling the keen edge of his hatchet; "as the Tartars have it, 'when you have spoken the word, it rules over you; while it is yet unspoken, you rule over it.' But it seems to me, Michail Podatchkine, that you have taken a great deal of trouble, and wasted much time in the matter of this dispatch. As you passed through the forest together, why the devil did you not give him a good *tzchick*"—(which we can only render "prod")—"in the back with your lance?"

"Because, if a wound is found on him, folks might say he had been murdered; and he must bear not a scar."

"And neither shall you, friend Podatchkine," said Paulovitch with a cruel grin.

"Come—don't make unpleasant jests," growled the Corporal, with a yawn and a shudder; "wounds have not been fashionable since Orloff and Bernikoff supped with Peter III."

"You grow wary as you grow older, Corporal."

"I have no desire to travel with the next caravan to Siberia, with one side of my head and face shaved, and an iron rosary, some five pound weight, at my wrists."

"Fear not—you will never see Siberia."

"Then you have made all sure about this Ivanovitch Balgonie?" said Podatchkine, whose utterance was becoming somewhat inarticulate.

"Ay, sure enough; the cups were——"

"The cups!"

"The cup, I mean, was drugged with those black berries which grow in the forest hereabout; the same stuff used by fine ladies to whiten their hands."

"But why the cup and not the wine?"

"For this reason: I might have been constrained to drink with him; and I had no desire to fall, like some one else, into a trap of my own baiting."

Podatchkine, on whom the powerful soporific with which his cup had been drugged—the sleepy nightshade—had been rapidly taking effect, and whose small cunning eyes had been opening and shutting alternately, while a numbness stole with a weariness over all his faculties, seemed suddenly to grasp at the terrible meaning of the speaker. He gave a start—he essayed to rouse himself and shout, but in doing so, toppled off his stool, and sank on the clay floor in a profound slumber.

"At last!" said the half-breed, administering a kick to the prostrate figure; "at last he has gone to sleep; now to make sure that he shall never waken more. Ah! the Asiatic! he was just getting suspicious at the end."

"There are two kopecs in his pocket," said the Stepniak, after investigating the garments of the snorting Podatchkine, who was now breathing heavily through his red snub nose, which between his scrubby beard and his shock of hair, was

almost the only feature of his face that was visible.

"Leave the kopecs where you found them!" said Nicholas, with a gipsy oath.

"Wherefore?" asked the Stepniak with surprise.

"It will seem all the more honest in thee, my good Stepniak, when you take the body—bodies, I should say—to the nearest military post. You have but to say you found them dead in the forest."

"And the wet clothing?"

"Dew or rain—what a head you have!"

"True—true; ah! what a man you are, Nicholas Paulovitch, so full of bright thoughts! That idea would never have occurred to me."

"Nor the other either. Quick, now; we have not a moment to lose!"

They extinguished the pine torch, and tying the Corporal's hands securely with a cord, carried him forth to the draw-well before the cottage. Then they substituted that worthy warrior's heels for the bucket which was usually appended to the rope, and permitting the winch to revolve softly and gently, lowered him down, snorting and gasping in his unnatural slumber, head foremost, into the deep dark water below!

The Stepniak turned the iron handle of the winch or windlass, while the gipsy guided the rope with its heavy burden. He was deliberately lowered down until only his heels remained above

water, as the two wretches could see by the starlight when stooping and peering into the darkness below.

The snorting had ceased now !

The dying Corporal was heard to struggle with his hands, as if he sought to free them from the cords ; a few bubbles filled with air rose to the surface and burst. This continued for a minute, during which all was silent elsewhere, save the half-suppressed breathing of the two assassins, and the dreary sound of the night wind, as it shook the dark branches of the giant pines that towered in solemn gloom around them.

Nicholas Paulovitch listened intently, and kept his eyes fixed on the cottage where their other victim lay, as he doubted not, sunk in what was intended to be his last sleep.

Anon, all became still—deathly still—in the depths of the dark well ; the rope ceased to vibrate, and the bubbles came no more.

“Let us leave him here for a few minutes, and now for the Captain and his dispatch ! By the time that we return, the Corporal will be as stiff as if he stood for sale in the frozen market on the fête of St. Nicholas !” said the gipsy, with one of his diabolical grins ; while the Stepniak, with a smile of satisfaction that showed all his huge yellow teeth, smoothed down to his eyebrows the thick coarse black hair that grew from the apex of his conical caput.

They now re-entered the cottage, and again

lighted the torch in its iron loutchin. All remained just as they had left it; the quass pitcher, the wooden bowls, the two cups, and the empty wine bottle were on the table, and the platters, with the débris of their rustic supper; but the superstitious gipsy felt a species of shudder come over him, for when the torch flared up in the night wind and cast strange shadows on the dingy and discoloured walls of the log-hut, it seemed to his diseased imagination, for a moment, as if the outline of the drowned Corporal still occupied the stool on which he had been seated.

"Come," said he huskily, "the dispatch!—and then for the other!"

They listened intently, and placed the ladder against the trap-door. All was still—not even the breathing of Balgonie was heard. Ascending first, with a knife in his teeth, in case of unexpected resistance, the gipsy knocked thrice on the trap without receiving any response. He then withdrew the wooden bolt, pushed it up, and introducing his head and shoulders, held aloft the pine torch, and turned towards the bed of skins.

It was unoccupied; and in a moment he saw that the bare and desolate chamber was without a tenant!

"Malediction!" he shouted; "he has escaped us—but how? Search—search! He cannot be far off, after the dose I have given him; search—and we must use our hatchets now!"

CHAPTER XI.

OLGA, THE GIPSY.

BALGONIE had scarcely thrown himself at length on the soft, but not very odorous, pile of skins which formed his couch, when a face appeared at the little window, which was pulled open, and a voice called to him in a low and earnest whisper:

“Hospodeen—Carl Ivanovitch! Hospodeen, attend to me; but oh, be silent, as you value your life!”

He started up, softly approached the window, and saw, by the dim starlight, a fair female face with very dark eyes, white and regular teeth, and long, glittering ear-rings.

“I have seen this face before,” thought he; “but when, and where?”

Balgonie, in truth, was too much of a lover to have more than one female face ever before his eyes—that of Natalie Mierowna.

“I am Olga, the gipsy,” said the girl, humbly.

“Olga! Olga! whom I saw at the house of Count Mierowitz this evening?”

“The same, Hospodeen!” (Balgonie expressed an exclamation of astonishment to find her, as

he thought, so far from that place.) "You gave me a silver kopec once upon a time, at Krejko, when passing through that town with Michail Podatchkine; and, this evening you saved me from the whip of the dvornick, when for the third time I had ventured near the Count's mansion, in a vain search for you, or the Hospoza Mierowna."

"In search of us—and for what purpose, girl?"

"To warn you, that for nearly a month past, a plot has been formed to deprive you of a valuable paper, and even of your life."

"My life—when?"

"On the first opportunity."

"By whom—and where, girl—where?"

"Here in this solitary hut—even now your assassins are in consultation—listen."

He placed his ear to the trap-door, and heard the murmur of hoarse whispers below.

"Hush," said Podatchkine, as already related, "take care!" Then followed the question of the subtle and ferocious Stepniak, as to why he had not given Balgonie a "prod" with his lance in the forest; and the whole conversation in all its horrible details, up to the moment when the wretched Corporal with death and terror mingling in his soul, fell from his seat in a stupor.

"Father in heaven!" exclaimed Balgonie, full of despair and horror, as he mechanically felt for his fatal dispatch, to ascertain that it was yet

safe, "I have drunk of this drugged stuff, and am also lost!"

"Nay," said the gipsy, hurriedly, "nay——"

"I drank the accursed wine from a cup——"

"True; but not from the cup which was intended for you."

"How?—speak!—speak!"

"The wine and the cups too were all stolen by Podatchkine, with many other things, at different times, from the household of Count Mierowitz. This night you were duly expected here, and thus a plan was laid to destroy both you and your treacherous guide. Two cups were fully and deeply drugged by my brother Nicholas: one was richly mounted with silver; and knowing well that it was to be set before you, I abstracted it barely an hour ago, substituting another of the same kind, and now I have it here. Oh, Hospodeen, a narrow escape you have had!"

Balgonie began to breathe more freely; but, assured that never had he run so narrow a risk of death, he felt, though enraged and furious, his blood run cold, when contemplating the fate intended for him. Peeping through a chink of the hatch or trap-door, he saw that the ladder of access had been removed, and that the door of the squalid cottage was open now, for the loutchin flared more than ever in the night wind. It was then extinguished; but still he could see, and hear them dragging forth the passive form of Corporal Podatchkine, whom he supposed to be dead.

Personally, Balgonie felt that he was no match for either of the powerful giants below—men whose bodily strength was quite equal to their ferocity, and whose daggers and hatchets might make mince-meat of him. Moreover, they had now deprived Podatchkine of his sabre and loaded pistols, and were thus more completely armed. Charlie had his hand on his sword—a handsome Turkish sabre ; but relinquishing the ideas either of attack or defence, while the glow of rage rose in his breast and cheek, he thought only of immediate flight.

“ If you would save your life and the dispatch of the Empress, follow me this instant, and get your horse before they return : you have not a moment to lose.”

It was the gipsy girl who spoke again, in her low earnest whisper, and with perfect decision.

“ Then I owe my escape—my safety——”

“ To my gratitude. Pass through the window and descend by the wall.”

“ Women,” says a certain philosopher, “ are not at all inferior to men in coolness and courage, and perhaps much less in resolution than is commonly imagined ; the reason they appear so is, because women affect to be more afraid than they really are, and men pretend to be less.”

Balgonie found that the courageous girl to whose guidance he now trusted himself, had been enabled to reach the window by standing on the roof of the outhouse, or shed, in which Podatch-

kine had stabled their horses. The whole edifice being built of squared logs, was not very high, and it afforded easy means of ascent and descent, by the interstices consequent to its rude construction by the hatchet. He soon leaped to the ground, and softly assisted her to descend.

"Here is your horse: you see, Hospodeen, that your kindness to the poor gipsy girl was not thrown away."

Balgonie looked rapidly to his bit and girth, adjusted himself in his saddle, hooked up the hilt of his sabre, and shortened his rein, almost unaware of the black tragedy being so coolly and deliberately acted on the other side of the cottage.

"Ten versts farther from this will bring you to the monastery of the Troitza, which you will know by its three domes. You have but to ride straight westward by the forest path; God keep you, and may you and the beautiful Hospoza be happy in your loves!"

"Tell me, gipsy girl——"

"Ah, I can foretell nothing, save that in love mere merit is of little matter."

"What is of most importance—beauty?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Success, Hospodeen."

He almost laughed, as he slipped into her hand two xervonitz (the largest coins he had), and in a moment more was galloping over the soft grass of the forest path she had indicated.

"By Jove," thought he, as he spurred on, "I shall not be sorry when this infernal dispatch is safe in the hands of old Bernikoff; and to think of that wretch of a Podatchkine! I always expected the fellow to be a rogue, but not of so deep a dye!"

The unfortunate Corporal, now, as he deserved, hanging head foremost downward in the draw-well, stark and stiff and cold, had been to all appearance a good Russian, Balgonie reflected: he neither confessed, fasted, nor did penance (too much bother all that would have been for the Corporal of Cossacks); but he kept Lent regularly to all appearance; made a sign of the cross fussily before and after every meal; always went to church when in camp or quarters; and never omitted his prayers and genuflexions at night, if in haunted places or when passing a wayside cross, especially if any one was by. All this was no doubt studiously hypocritical; and Charlie remembered that his worthy Uncle Gam kept Fast-days and "Sabbaths" with stern and gloomy rigour; that he said a long and sonorous prayer before meals—a longer prayer after them; that he went thrice daily to kirk at the ordained periods, and had nightly a noisy expounding and out-pouring of the spirit that would have put the great John of Geneva himself to the blush.

"Ah," thought poor Charlie, as he trotted on his lonely way through the darkened forest, "decidedly there are Podatchkines in Scotland as well as elsewhere, and in Russia."

The light was beginning to dawn, for it was the morning of one of the first days of May, so long had he been detained by illness—shall we say by love?—at the castle by the Louga, that Muscovite Eden, as now it seemed to him. The birds were chirping merrily in the woods; and in some places he saw the brown rocks shaded by a species of graceful silver birch and dark rowan tree, similar to those that grew in his native strath at home.

By midsummer he knew that the birchen glades he traversed would be in full foliage, and that the rowan berries would hang in ripe red clusters among the thick green leaves; and that there, too, would be grey lichens on the granite cliffs, and in their clefts soft emerald moss, the wild strawberries, and the drooping bells of the purple foxglove, just as he had seen them where the Earn “gurgling kissed her pebbled shore” as it flowed towards the Tay.

They seemed like old friends in that strange place, and with a sigh of gratitude for his escape from a perilous and deadly snare was mingled one of hope—a wish—a bootless wish, that one day he might sit by the banks of the lovely Earn with Natalie by his side, amid all the security his native land afforded, and under the white blooming hawthorns that cast their sweet fragrance to the soft winds of the Perthshire valley.

Beloved Natalie—so fair and delicate, so dark haired and so bright-eyed! Her diamond ring,

and still more her lock of soft and silky hair, brought all the charm and sense of her presence vividly before him. He counted the brief hours since they had parted, and sighed to think how many hours and days and weeks must inevitably elapse before they met again.

In memory and imagination, he conned over and over again each tender speech and glance, each mute caress and passionate kiss, with every circumstance and minutiae of their occurrence and bestowal; and what lover has not done so since time began, and apples grew, and roses bloomed in Eden! Even his recent narrow escape and the gipsy's gratitude were forgotten in the ardour of his thoughts.

And he sighed again, when thinking how wild and insane were the dreams in which he was indulging, as he touched his horse with the spurs, on seeing the three shining domes of the Troitza, or monastery of the Holy Trinity, rise before him amid the green woodlands.

CHAPTER XII.

ST. PETERSBURG.

AFTER traversing a green valley some five or six miles in length, bordered on each side by forests of fir trees, dark, solemn and acutely conical, where the sunlight could scarcely ever penetrate to the thick rank grass and herbage that grew below, and where a merry gurgling brook rushed noisily along by the side of the narrow horseway, Charlie Balgonie drew his bridle at the gates of the Troitza monastery, when its white walls, its three great cupolas, shaped each like a gigantic onion inverted, covered with plates of burnished copper, and all painted and bestarred, were shining gaily in the morning sun.

There he was made welcome by the monks—quaint-looking men, in long black caftans, with high black caps, fashioned like our modern hats, but without brims, and having black veils floating behind over their long, straight hair. He deposited some money with the treasurer, declined the invitation of the sacristan to see the uncorrupted body of some saint with an unpronounceable name, reposing in its shrine like a

silver bedstead, and its head begirt by a diadem with pearls as large as pistol bullets; for the saint had been a martyr, who, in the days of Ivan Basilovitch, the Tartars had rewarded for his attempts to convert them by knocking out his brains; and now he was a miserable mummified relic of humanity, before which, for many ages, thousands of devotees had knelt and wept and smote their breasts in paroxysms of prayer. Charlie waived the invitation; and after having a good breakfast in the refectory, and there telling his story to the monks, he was somewhat bewildered when informed by them, that after all his (certainly circuitous) journey with Podatchkine on the preceding evening and night, and after his riding since he had left the cottage of the gipsy, he was still barely twenty miles from the Louga!

Was a spell cast upon him? was his horse bewitched, that he was to continue travelling thus, and yet never make progress? It almost seemed so; but one of the monks, a more shrewd man than his brothers, explained the whole affair as being consequent to the cunning of Podatchkine, and his scheme for destroying the dispatch-bearer.

A large party of pilgrims on horse and foot were returning to St. Petersburg that afternoon. With them Balgonie travelled for the remainder of his journey; and, after traversing a wild and desert tract of country, on the evening of the next day he had the pleasure of beholding, in the

distance before him, that new but vast and splendid capital,—

“Proud city ! Sovereign mother thou
Of all Slavonian cities now,”—

covering the once wild waste whereon, before the time of Peter the Great, the father of his country, a few wretched fishermen were wont to contend with the wolves and bears for a spot to erect their huts—where, as Count Segur says, winter reigned for eight months of the year, rye was an article of garden culture, and a bee-hive a curiosity.

Its bulbous-shaped Byzantine domes, and tall needle-like spires, and all its countless roofs, that rose beyond each other in ridgy succession like the waves of the sea, and are generally like the sea in colour, being of a brilliant green or an ashy hue, were now all tinted redly by the rays of the setting sun, which cast the shadows of its many bridges on the waters of the Neva and of the canals that glided silently and darkly beneath them.

As the sun sank beyond the Gulf of Finland, and the shadows deepened on every plated dome and granite rampart, the great gilt crosses of our Lady of Kazan (a fane which was ten years in building) and of many other noble churches glittered, or rather seemed to burn like stars, amid the deep blue of the cloudless sky beyond.

Balgonie's satisfaction, on finding himself so near the end of his journey, was somewhat clouded by a trivial circumstance.

After entering the city by a palisaded barrier, where stood a guard of the Regiment of Valikolutz, he checked his horse's pace, while the caravan of pilgrims, whom he now wished to quit, traversed a long street of small wooden houses that lay beyond. Here, close by the margin of the Neva, lay a man with his loose caftan wet and dripping, and a piece of sack or old canvas spread over his face. On his breast lay his fur cap, as if to receive alms for his burial; for none doubted that he was a poor drowned fellow just fished up from the Neva, and that money was required of the religious and charitable alike for his obsequies and masses for the repose of his soul. So all the pilgrims from the Troitza threw something into the fur cap, where denuscas, kopecs, even roubles and Polish ducats, jingled fast together, while the passers muttered prayers and made signs of the cross.

All the caravan had passed, so the clatter of Balgonie's charger, steel-scabbard, and accoutrements, seemed to create a different effect on the attentive ear of the seemingly drowned man; for the knave, who had only been acting, started up, and, with his spoil, fled like a hare down one of the little alleys that opened off the wooden street. He vanished in the twilight, yet not so quickly but that Balgonie was able to recognise in his face and form, the bulky and muscular half-bred, the gipsy, Nicholas Paulovitch.

What had brought him to St. Petersburg?

Was he still dogging the luckless dispatch-bearer, or had he only fled thither that, among its thousands, he might elude the punishment with which Count Mierowitz would be sure to visit him, if the murder of the Corporal was discovered?

This episode made Balgonie feel uncomfortable, and suspicious that other and hidden dangers yet menaced him, as he rode steadily but watchfully through the densely crowded, but monotonously regular streets of houses, which are stuccoed, white-washed, and decorated with different colours, roofed with wood and iron, painted in most instances green, and nearly all pillared and piazzaed—each long vista, with its oil lamps, being terminated by domes and spires; and ere long he saw the lights shining in the lofty windows of that magnificent crescent, which, for a time, was the palace of Catharine's most cherished favourite, "the fair-faced Lanskoï," as Byron has it—

"A lover who had cost her many a tear,
And yet but made a middling Grenadier."

And now the melodious bells were ringing for vespers in the towers of our Lady of Kazan—a Greek cruciform fane, which was founded as a rival to St. Peter's at Rome, and named after the Tartar kingdom of Kazan. It is the greatest church in the city, and one of high sanctity.

Along the northern margin of the Neva, a river broad as the Thames at London Bridge, but (unlike the Thames) deep, blue, and transparent as crystal, lined with solid granite quays, and

bordered by many stately palatial edifices, Balgonie pursued his way ; but the stars were shining at midnight on the vast sheet of water called the Lake of Ladoga, before he, weary and worn with fatigue, dismounted beneath the formidable gates of the castellated prison of Schlusselfburg, which had been strengthened and fortified anew by General Count Todleben, whose arrest and quarrel with the Empress had made so much noise three years before the time our story opens.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE SECRET DISPATCH CONTAINED.

TWENTY-FOUR miles eastward of the city, the small town and fortress of Schlusselfburg stand, at a point where the Neva issues from the Lake of Ladoga, and on the left bank of the river. The little town had then somewhere about three thousand inhabitants, who chiefly lived by the manufacture of cotton and porcelain.

On an island, where the river joins the lake and moats it round, is built the fort, which is about four hundred yards square: its walls are of stone, massive, and fifty feet in height, terminating in battlements and turrets of antique form.

The passage to this island is by a long draw-bridge.

The guard which kept this formidable state prison, where many a hopeless sigh was wafted through the rusty bars of its prison grilles across the waters of Ladoga, was composed entirely of a body of dismounted Cossacks, selected for the purpose, as the task of keeping or secluding the dethroned Emperor Ivan was one of no small responsibility and importance; so these men were

all Cossacks of a high class, and were rather richly dressed.

Their short blue jackets were elaborately embroidered with yellow lace, and a multitude of gilt buttons, but were hooked across the chest; their trowsers of scarlet cloth were loose, long, and gathered into their boots, which were of brown Russian leather, and reached to six inches above the ankle. Their busbies of black shining fur had bright scarlet bags, tall white feathers, a cockade, and tasselled cord. They were all clean and soldier-like men, well moustached, and sternly resolute in bearing; and all were armed with musketoons, short sabres, and brass pistols.

A guard of these men received Balgonie at the gate and drawbridge with a profound military salute; and a picturesque aspect they presented, as their arms flashed in the murky light of the great oil lantern that swung in the dark, weird, and deep-mouthed archway, where a massive portcullis showed its iron teeth, all red and rusted by the mists of the Neva and the stormy blasts that swept across the Lake of Ladoga.

The great masses of the fortress, ghostly and shrouded, with faint red lights gleaming out here and there; the enormous strength of the gates, their planking, bolts, and bars; the thickness of the walls; the number of embrasures and loopholes for cannon and musketry, all converging to one point, the approach or river entrance; the number of sentinels, and, more than all, the vast

strength of the portcullis and double gates, together with the difficulties he experienced in procuring admission, though in uniform, and though a staff officer bearing a dispatch of the Empress, all served to impress unpleasantly on the mind of Charlie Balgonie a state of extreme watchfulness, of suspicion, and mistrust; and also a sense of the vast responsibility of the charge confided by Catharine to Colonel Bernikoff.

That gallant officer and estimable personage had retired long since, after a deep drinking bout, and would be—as Lieutenant Tschekin (the son-in-law of General Weymarn), who was third in command of the fortress, informed Balgonie—quite invisible till breakfast time to-morrow, when the dispatch would be delivered to him: and a sigh of real annoyance escaped Charlie, when he found that this odious paper was to be yet some eight hours or more in his secret pocket.

He repaired to the officers' guard-room at the barrier gate, and there, wrapped in his cloak, without undressing (as he hoped next day to exchange the atmosphere of Schlusselfburg for that of some hotel in the Vasili-Ostrov), lay down to sleep, and if possible to dream of Natalie; but he had undergone too much toil for such gentle phantasms, so he slept like a dormouse, till the sun was high in heaven, unawakened even by the deep boom of the morning gun, a 36-pounder, as it pealed across the Lake of Ladoga; but ultimately he was roused by Tschekin and Captain

Vlasief, a very handsome young man, but a cruel and heartless *roué*, whom ultimately he detested. These, after shaking him heartily, announced that Colonel Bernikoff awaited him at breakfast, and was not in a mood to brook much delay.

His hasty toilette was soon complete, and he was speedily ushered into a plain, almost naked white-washed apartment arched with stone. Through its grated windows the morning sun shone cheerily, and the blue waters of the lake could be seen with the white sails of many a tiny coasting vessel.

Here, at a table of plain Memel timber, destitute of cloth, but on which massive silver vessels with rudely formed wooden bowls and platters were oddly intermingled, was seated the Governor, who, like the czars and boyars of old, still took quass for breakfast with roasted beef or bear's ham, bread with caviare, greens with vinegar, salted plums and other abominations. But Balgonie saw that coffee and even tea, with ham, eggs, and kippered salmon, were prepared, with other condiments, for those who, like himself, had nothing of the Tartar in their blood.

"Hail to you—I wish you health," said Bernikoff, courteously enough, in the old Russian fashion, and presenting his hand to Charlie, who took it, shuddering as he remembered the fate of Peter III.; "welcome to Schlusselfburg, Captain Ivanovitch Balgonie."

Bernikoff, who wore a dark-green undress uni-

form faced with scarlet, was a man well up in years; he had fierce and shining black eyes that made soldier and serf alike quail beneath their gaze; yet they were small, cunning, and twinkling eyes, the lashes of which were half closed—the eyes of one who could act the cruel tyrant on one hand, and the cringing slave on the other. He had a massive, square, and brutal jaw, thin wicked lips, a nose as round as a grape-shot, close short grizzled hair, and long snaky mustachioes.

He was of Tartar blood, and came of those “warlike and merciless tribes who studied nothing but the use of arms; who passed their lives on horseback; who even lived on their horses in this sense, that their chief food was horseflesh and the milk of mares; who, at the same time, could go for days without food; and who, when they took a city by storm, put all the inhabitants to the sword except the working men.”

“Seat yourself, Captain, and proceed to breakfast, while I read your dispatch,” said the Governor. “Holy Sergius! it is from Catharine Christianowna herself! The Czarina is great, but Heaven is higher!” he added, placing the paper on his forehead, as he bowed over it; and then taking an enormous pinch of Beresovski snuff, a most pungent compound, from a gold box said to have been found in the pocket of Peter III., he proceeded to peruse that document which had proved of such trouble to the bearer.

The eyes of Balgonie, Tschekin, and Vlasief,

who alone were present, were fixed inquiringly upon him, and they could see that the contents disturbed him greatly; he grew pale and flushed by turns; his brows contracted to a terrible frown; a red spark of devilish light glittered in his eyes, and his lips were compressed.

"Ah, the Asiatics! the accursed Asiatics!" he muttered. This is a most opprobrious epithet in Russia, and excited some surprise in his hearers.

He carefully folded the dispatch, and turning sternly to Charlie, who was keeping his eyes on him and drinking his coffee the while, he said:—

"Ivanovitch Balgonie, there is a feather in the seal—the usual sign of *haste* among us here in Russia; yet you have not troubled yourself much with speed, for this dispatch is dated at Novgorod more than a month back!"

"Permit me to explain, Excellency," said Balgonie eagerly, and anxiously too.

"I shall be glad if you *can* explain it," replied Bernikoff, with increasing sternness. "I have known a general, a leader in ten battles, degraded, knouted, and sent to hunt the ermine with a cannon ball at his heels for a smaller dereliction of duty than this."

Balgonie's heart beat very fast while he related his story—of his being misled by a traitor twice; of the passage of the Louga at such terrible hazard; of his subsequent illness; and the episode at that log hut.

"That you were in the guidance of a traitor,

I knew before your arrival ; and I am extremely glad that he fell into his own snare," replied Bernikoff, a little more calmly ; " but this matter is extremely awkward for you, and becomes more complicated every hour."

After glancing again at the dispatch, and bending his keen, rat-like eyes on Balgonie, he asked :

" Were Basil Mierowitz or Usakoff, the grandson of Mazeppa, at the Castle of Louga any time during your sojourn there ? "

" No, Excellency, neither of them were."

" Spies say differently—but you can swear it ? "

" On my honour do I swear it ! But why ? "

" I have had bad news from the head-quarters of your regiment, and from Lieutenant-General Weymarn, since you left Novgorod."

" And these tidings, Excellency ? "

" Are to the effect that your friends, the two subalterns, have both deserted, with several soldiers, all of whom are natives of the Ukraine."

" Deserted ! "

" And are nowhere to be found, though pursued by a whole sotnia of Cossacks."

" Deserted ! " reiterated Balgonie with real concern.

" Yes—the cursed Asiatics ! " replied Bernikoff, expectorating with great vehemence, and thoroughly believing that each time he did so, he cast out a devil.

For some moments intense anxiety and alarm bewildered Balgonie, and he felt himself grow

pale at a time when six searching eyes were bent with a doubtful expression upon him. He remembered the hostility, the threatening and mysterious words of Natalie, and grew almost sick with apprehension of he knew not what, as he muttered inaudibly—

“Basil deserted—and his cousin too! The whole family will be inculpated and degraded. Oh, Natalie, my hapless love! Did General Weymarn state this in *his* dispatch?” he asked aloud.

“He did, and at its end referred to you.”

“To me, Excellency?”

“Yes; here is the document, and it concludes thus: ‘as I and the Regiment of Smolensko will shortly march into St. Petersburg, Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie need not return to Novgorod; but until then, shall attach himself to your staff, and remain in Schlusselfburg, where, erelong, you may require all the good service he can render you.—WEYMARN.’”

Great were the mortification and disgust of Balgonie on learning that he was to remain for an indefinite period in a place so revolting and uncomfortable, and with no other society than that of three military jailers,—cruel, hard-hearted, and avaricious Muscovites of the worst kind; and with these orders died his hopes of revisiting, as he intended, Louga, on his return, and of seeing Natalie again.

Under ban as all the household of Mierowitz

would be now, should he ever see her more? Every way fate and the tide of events seemed to be against him and her, already in the very dawn of their love.

"And now, gentlemen," said the Governor, lowering his voice, "the Empress's dispatch contains only two lines, thus: 'A scheme is formed to free Prince Ivan. *Let him not fall alive into the hands of those who come to seek for him!*' Nor shall he!" exclaimed Bernikoff with ferocious enthusiasm, as he dashed a cup of vodka among his quass, and drained the goblet, after shouting, "The health of Her Imperial Majesty Catharine Christianowna—hurrah!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!" added Vlasfief and the Lieutenant.

Balgonie also, as in duty bound, essayed to "hurrah," but the sound died away on his lips.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLIE'S FIRST DAY IN SCHLUSSELBURG.

FULL of anxious thoughts, he passed more than half of the succeeding day on the ramparts of the castled-prison, alone, avoiding Colonel Bernikoff, Captain Vlasief, and their subaltern, Tschekin, none of whom were consonant to his taste, for all were deep gamblers and heavy drinkers.

His mind was full of care for Natalie and all her family. Some desperate and revengeful plot, of which the desertion of her brother and of his cousin Usakoff was but the beginning, the means to an end, was certainly hatching—a plot that might too surely end in bloodshed, in the savage punishment and the ruin of all.

He sorrowed keenly for his two friends Basil Mierowitz and Apollo Usakoff, for both were polished and educated gentlemen, men of a class and style more common in some corps of the Russian army now, than in those days. And there was poor Mariolizza, too—so brightly beautiful, so happy, and so merry! Her love, her hopes and schemes, would all be crushed and blighted, as well as his own.

Balgonie was not without fears for himself, and

of being compromised in the affair ; or, perhaps, lured into subtle state intrigues and deep plots, in the failure or success of which he could have no interest politically or personally, save in his love for Natalie—a love that had changed the whole current of his ideas and opened up a new realm of thought and incentive to action.

Already he was beginning to revolt at the Russian service, and yet he had been happy in the Regiment of Smolensko, and had found in the land of his adoption, like every Scottish adventurer that has trod the Russian soil, honours scarcely to be won at home.

How long was he to be on the staff of this ferocious Commandant, and in this horrible prison, where many an innocent victim was pining hopelessly in chains and misery ? “The mutual distrust in which people live in Russia,” says the Abbé Chappe D’Auteroche in his scarce travels about this time, “and the total silence of the nation upon everything which may have the least relation either to the government or the sovereign, arise chiefly from the privilege every Russian has, without distinction, of crying out in public, *slowo dielo* ; that is to say, ‘I declare you are guilty of high treason, both in words and actions.’ All the bystanders are then obliged to assist in arresting the person so accused ; a father his son, and the son his father, while nature suffers in silence. The accuser and accused are at once conveyed to prison, and afterwards to

St. Petersburg, where they are tried by the Secret Court of Chancery."

Thanks to this pleasant state of society, the chambers and chains of Schlusselfburg were seldom unoccupied.

Vlasief was hollow-hearted, avaricious, and sensual; Tschekin, the Lieutenant, a slimy, cruel, reckless, and ignorant Muscovite; but old Bernikoff was really a character whom Balgonie equally dreaded and despised.

His subtlety and oppression had been the means of reducing, at different times, some thirty officers to the ranks, with permission to serve and work their way up again; and many more were now cursing him and their fate, at Irkutsk and remoter Siberia, for their inability to purchase his mercy or good-will. When commanding at Cronstadt, he had been detected once in the act of transmitting whole sledge loads of government shot, shell, lead, and ropes, across the frozen gulf for sale in Sweden; and also in buying at a cheap rate base denuscas to pay the troops: but so trusted was the old rascal by the Empress, that he always escaped the degradation, the hanging or shooting, which, on those discoveries, were so freely meted out to his subalterns.

On the estate of Bernikoff a serf once amassed ten thousand roubles, and offered them for the freedom of his daughter, who was about to be married.

"Let me see the girl!" was the reply.

As a serf can possess nothing, the father trembled in his soul at this demand, as his daughter, unfortunately for herself, was beautiful.

“Holy Sergius!” exclaimed Bernikoff, “what business has a serf with ten thousand roubles; the girl and the money are alike mine!”

And so he literally and lawfully seized them both.

Though a savage soldier, like every old Muscovite, he was the slave of mechanical devotion. No statue or picture of the Holy Virgin, of St. Sergius, or St. Alexander Newski, was ever passed by him without a profound reverence and a sign of the cross. To such effigies he would address himself before he knelt even to the Empress: and before them he had been known to kneel and kiss the ground five minutes before or after he had knouted a miserable boor (whose pockets were empty), or nearly slain a soldier by making him run the gauntlet, for merely having the seams of his gloves sewn outward instead of in; for wearing his hat on the left side of his head instead of the right; or for some other offence equally heinous.

And it was on the staff of this distinguished officer (temporarily, however) that Charlie now, to his great disgust, found himself.

On three sides, far around this island prison, stretched the waters of Ladoga—the largest lake in Europe, being one hundred and thirty miles long, by nearly ninety broad; full of rocky isles

and dangerous quicksands, over which, from its flat shores, sweep frequent and perilous storms.

From the somewhat dreary view of this small inland sea, whose northern and eastern coast could not be discerned, he turned to survey the fortress, with all its strength of gloomy walls, grated windows, and frowning cannon, till suddenly his eye was arrested by a very remarkable face, which was observing him from the sombre depth of a strongly barred and arched window of the great tower.

It was a pale face, but singularly handsome—grave, and even sad in expression—a young man's face with the slightest indication of a moustache, but for which, in its paleness and extreme delicacy of feature and tint, it might have passed for that of a twin brother of Natalie Mierowna !

Suddenly it was detected by a Cossack sentinel, who shouted shrilly, and slapped the but-end of his loaded musketoon : on this, the face instantly disappeared.

This was he concerning whom Balgonie had brought that terrible dispatch—Ivan, the deposed Emperor—the prisoner of Schlusselburg !

“Twenty-three years !” thought Balgonie with a shudder ; “twenty-three years in that tower—since his very babyhood—oh, it is terrible !”

Other ears had heard the shout of the sentinel ; for now a man, who in a boat had been fishing near the fortress, suddenly shipped a pair of sculls, and pulled away towards the town with an air of

alarm that seemed equalled only by his dexterity. This fisher had been hovering about the fortress all day. "Can he be the gipsy—the half-breed?" thought Charlie: "ah! the dispatch is out of my hands now."

Lieutenant Tschekin now approached with an invitation from Bernikoff to join him at dinner, adding, "remember that with the Colonel, eating is indeed a science, and temperance he views as mere want of spirit."

As they proceeded together through various archways and gates, the shrieks and entreaties of a man apparently in mortal agony rang through the echoing prisons with a horrible cadence, that chilled the free blood in Balgonie's veins.

A court through which they had to pass was crowded by soldiers, formed in hollow square, and Balgonie was compelled to linger and look on with Tschekin, who seemed rather to enjoy the spectacle.

"Hah," said he, "the punishment is nearly ended—let us wait and see the *batogg*!"

It was a soldier being knouted, which is simply the Russian word for "whipped."

Stripped to the loins, he was strapped to an erect board, formed like an inverted cone, and having three notches at the upper end, one to receive his chin, and the other two his wrists, while the torturer wielded a knout, the handle of which is usually eighteen inches long with a thong of thirty-six inches. This is always boiled

in milk, by which process it swells and the edges become sharp, hard, and more destructive.

The whipper was skilful: he laid on his lashes from the neck to the loins, so as to deal them at intervals of one inch artistically apart, leaving a stripe of flesh between each; but these regulated and omitted stripes, after receiving a fresh knout, he proceeded to take off in succession, with wonderful and terrible precision, till the man's entire back was a mass of blood, and he hung, fainting and well-nigh speechless, by the wrists.

"Oh, Excellency," he said, in an imploring voice, "remember that my brother, Alexis Jagouski, aided you in escaping from the battle of Zorndorff!"

This was most true, but the story was a terrible one. At Zorndorff, where the Russians were defeated with such slaughter and driven towards the frontiers of Poland, the horse of Bernikoff was shot under him, and he was in danger of being cut down by the Prussian Hussars. In this sore extremity a Cossack named Alexis Jagouski took his leader behind him on his crupper; but that personage, finding that the double weight impeded the horse's speed, and that the Hussars were close behind, shortened his sabre in his hand, and plunging the blade into the body of his preserver, flung the corpse from the saddle, and escaped alone.

At this reminiscence Bernikoff only scowled more deeply; and now the lacerated back of the

sufferer was strewed with coarse gunpowder, to which a match was applied. This is technically known as the *batogg*, and the agony it produced is indescribable.

The culprit was now cast loose, but was still able, according to the slavish usage of the country, to crawl on his hands and knees towards Bernikoff, and he gasped out:—

“Hospodeen—Excellency, I thank you humbly for this most merciful punishment.”

“Begone, dog of an Asiatic!” replied the governor, kicking him in the face; “when next you seek to fill your pipe, this will teach you to keep your filthy fingers out of my tobacco pouch.”

These were the defenders of their country, the Holy Russia, among whom a wayward fate had cast the Scottish palatine: the blood of the latter boiled within him; but he knew too well that to expostulate would be but to excite suspicion, and to court degradation and the musket. Something, however, in the expression of his face did not escape Bernikoff’s keen and angry eyes.

“Ivanovitch Balgonie, a superior can never act unjustly to his inferior,” said he sternly; and these words terribly embodied the genuine spirit of the true Russian *Tchinnochnik*, or noble class. “I am in the service of the state,” he added; “and the state is the Czarina!”

Yet this upright Governor, who knouted the poor Cossack for pilfering a pipeful of tobacco,

had always a garrison double its actual strength on paper, the pay and rations of the men of straw forming a pleasant addition to his many secret perquisites, while his soldiers starved and frequently begged food from the very prisoners they guarded.

It was neither hospitality nor love of society which had procured the honour of an invitation for Balgonie; but Bernikoff shrewdly suspecting that he might have some loose cash, resolved to possess himself thereof at cards; so barely was a dinner of *shee* (which is identically Scotch broth), croquettes, with *purée* of beet-root, beef in the Hussar style, with salad of baked beet-root and biscuits, dismissed, than champagne-cup, and vodka (or corn-brandy) punch became the order of the evening; and Bernikoff, who was a great gourmand, with his face flushed and his uniform open, after signing the cross and bowing thrice to a picture of St. Sergius, sat down to cards with Vlasfief and Tschekin, who were quite as sharp as himself, and with poor simple-hearted Charlie Balgonie, who dreaded to decline, circumstanced as he was on all hands; and who was glad when allowed to quit the table with the loss, he never could understand how, of twenty xervonitz, or pieces worth nine shillings sterling each.

"Now, Vlasfief—'tis you and I; rouge-et-noir!" exclaimed Bernikoff, draining a goblet of vodka punch at a draught.

"I am too weary to play, most excellent

Colonel; pray excuse me," urged the Captain, who had lost considerably to his senior also.

"You, then, Tschekin?" said Bernikoff savagely.

"I hav'n't a kopec to spare, Excellency!"

"Well—I saw a pretty housemaid at your mansion in the town yesterday—the daughter of a serf apparently."

"Feodorowna?"

"Very likely—with red hair and brown eyes."

"Ah! the same; she came with Madame Tschekin from the household of her father, General Weymarn."

"By all the devils, she is very like old Weymarn!"

"She is the daughter of my old nurse, Colonel," said Tschekin gravely, with an air of annoyance.

"I don't care whose daughter she is!"

"Well?"

"I'll put a hundred silver roubles on her."

"Done! I put her on the ace."

"The ace hath lost!" exclaimed Bernikoff, with a shout of laughter. "Holy Sergius! the girl is mine. To-morrow," he added, "I'll send a corporal and a file of men for her, with a covered kabitka. See that all her things are packed and ready, friend Tschekin, or write to your wife about it, and say you have lost her at cards."

"The devil!—Excellency—this can't be."

"Why? I won her fairly."

"But the girl is about to be married to her cousin."

"*Was*, you mean ; the cards have changed her destiny, like that of the serfs whom Vlasfief drank away in champagne last night."

So passed Charlie's first day at Schlusselfburg.

CHAPTER XV.

THE IMPERIAL PRISONER.

FORTUNATELY for Balgonie, there was a chaplain, or priest, of the Russian Greek Church, attached to the fortress; and his society, at times, tended to alleviate what he endured from having to associate with such a human bear as Colonel Bernikoff,—an annoyance from which he would only be relieved by the longed-for return of General Weymarn and the Regiment of Smolensko to St. Petersburg.

The ceremonies of religion retain in Russia all their pristine influence, and afford the miserable and unlettered serf a short season of relaxation from labour and severity during festivals, when he may enjoy his can of fiery vodka and revel in intoxication. Unlike many of the Russian clergy, who adopt the cowl merely as the means of evading slavery in civil life, or slavery added to peril in the army, and also as a chance of attaining to power and nobility, Father Chrysostom, the Chaplain of Schlusselfburg, was a humane, gentle, and learned old priest, whom the Commandant had been depraved enough to strike with his clenched hand on more than one occasion; but

prior to doing so, he had always contrived, oddly and superstitiously enough, to have the chief badge of the father's sacred office, his baretta, abstracted and hidden.

Through the good offices of the Chaplain, with the permission of the Governor, which was yielded very unwillingly, Balgonie (whose curiosity and commiseration were greatly excited) was presented one evening to the deposed Emperor Ivan, and the particulars and incidents of that interview made a deep and sad impression upon him.

The entrance-door of the central tower was small, arched, and of great strength. Above it were carved the Russian arms, first adopted by Ivan Basilovitch in the sixteenth century: a spread-eagle, having on its breast an escutcheon bearing St Michael and a dragon, with three crowns in chief for Muscovy and the two Tartar kingdoms of Kazan and Astracan.

On passing through a little paved court, grated over with iron, where the royal recluse was permitted to breathe the external air, while a sentinel trod to and fro above his head; another door-way, secured by a portcullis grooved into the wall, gave access to the narrow stair which led to his apartments. These were two in number: their windows and doors were all grated with iron; and sentinels, with loaded arms, watched every avenue by day and night.

His sitting-room was plainly, even neatly furnished: its chief ornaments being a pretty

Madonna and some gaudy pictures of Muscovite saints; and it had one window, which opened towards the vast expanse of the Lake of Ladoga.

Pale, handsome, and resigned, gentle in eye and manner, the poor young Prince had grown to manhood in total ignorance of the outer world and of all he had lost. He knew only the four walls of the prison, the changing hues of the waves and clouds, the wild swans and the waters of Ladoga.

As related in our fifth chapter, the Prisoner of Schlussemburg was the eldest son of the Princess of Mecklenburg, Elizabeth-Catharine, niece of the Empress Anne. His father was Anthony Ulric, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, whose whole family was banished Russia by the usurping Empress Elizabeth.

The infant Ivan had been dethroned, after being a king for exactly one year.

During the reign of the Empress Catharine, he was detained in Schlussemburg "under the denomination of a *Person Unknown*, and it was given out that his senses were impaired, though it is pretty well understood that this is without foundation." "His fate has been particularly lamentable," continues a newspaper of the period; "torn from the bosom of his family, he has now passed twenty-three years in close captivity. The late Empress Elizabeth, towards the latter end of her life, seemed disposed to treat this noble captive with clemency and favour, either from sentiments of justice and compassion, or to ren-

der two great personages more circumspect and submissive."

These personages were her successors, the unfortunate Peter III. and Catharine II.

Ivan's mother is said to have died of grief; but Duke Anthony Ulric and his four other children were all confined for life in a house at Horsens, a town of Jutland, at the extremity of the Baltic, where they had a precinct of a mile English; but it was surrounded by high palisades, beyond which they dared not venture under pain of death; and there the Duke, old and blind, passed the last years of his melancholy life.

His youngest daughter, Elizabeth, "was a woman of high spirit and elegant manners," according to Coxe, the traveller, who visited her; "she possessed portraits of her father and mother, and even contrived to procure a rouble of her brother Ivan, struck during his short reign. It is difficult to conjecture how she could obtain a coin, the possession of which was more than once punished by the Empress Elizabeth as high-treason, and it is still more difficult to imagine how she could secret it from the knowledge of her guards during her long imprisonment."

Confinement had rendered Ivan's features unnaturally pale and delicate; and, by years of systematic constraint and oppression, his fine, clear, and very beautiful dark eyes had a soft, subdued, and chastened expression, that was singularly touching and winning.

The tone of his voice was also gentle and alluring.

"Hospodeen," said he, presenting his hand to Balgonie, "I rejoice to meet you, if one who leads a life so strange as mine can be said to rejoice; but you are one to whom I may talk a little without danger—eh, Father Chrysostom? And he has told me, Hospodeen, that you are not a Russian, but a native of some island that is far away in the sea. What are you? A Tartar—a Tcherkesse? Oh no, you cannot be either. I know them; for they guard me," he added, with a little shudder.

"I am your friend, believe me, Ivan Antonovitch," replied Balgonie, who was touched by the childlike simplicity of the poor recluse, who was plainly attired in a caftan of fine green cloth, edged with a narrow trimming of yellow fur; the square crowned cap, which he only wore when in the grated court, was of the same materials. A small gold cross was at his neck, a rosary of amber hung at his right wrist, and a little pipe, the only luxury allowed him, was dangling from one of his breast buttons.

When in his presence, Balgonie always thought with horror of the cruel tenor of the dispatch he had brought, and trembled for the result of his friends' conspiracy.

To teach Ivan anything, even to read or to write, was treason; yet he had gleaned a little of his own history, and that of his family, from

the casual remarks of his guards and from the Chaplain, during the long, long years of his captivity, the reason for which he failed to understand, but the system of which had become as a second nature to him; and the little he learned, made a deep, rather than a bitter impression upon him.

The whole energies of each successive Chaplain had been given to preparing him for another and a brighter state of existence, and to turning his hopes and wishes towards it, rather than to this world, of which he was well-nigh weary if not utterly ignorant; and so much was he impressed by the uncertainty of human life in general, and of his own in particular, that daily, for years, he had seen the sun rise from the waters of Ladoga in doubt whether he would see it set; and nightly had he laid down his head without the assurance of being a live man in the morning.

Life had no charm—death no terror for Ivan.

In his visits, which were frequent, as the young Prince had conceived a great regard for him, Charlie Balgonie knew not upon what topics to converse; for he experienced great difficulty in fashioning his sentences and observations to suit a listener whose knowledge of the external world and of all the machinery of life was so limited. In those visits, Balgonie was always accompanied by the Chaplain, or Captain Vlasief, as the

watchful and suspicious Bernikoff would by no means permit them to have an interview alone.

"I am so glad to have you for a friend, Ivanovitch Balgonie," the Prince would say sometimes; "though Father Chrysostom assures me that kings may have peers and soldiers, serfs and slaves, but, alas! they can never have a *friend*! I have heard my guards say that I was once a King—an Emperor; but I cannot remember when. It must have been long, long ago, as Russia has had four monarchs since. I have not even a dream of it—an Emperor? Yet I shall too probably die even as Demetrius did. I cannot remember even my mother; for they tell me that she died of sorrow, when I was brought here from a place called Moscow. Do you, Hospodeen, remember yours?"

"When I was but a child she died, to my sorrow. Had she lived, I might not have been here in Russia to-day," replied Balgonie.

"Well—but you may remember," persisted the young Prince.

"True, your Highness; memories I have of a soft fair face that bent over my little bed at night; of one who kissed and hushed me to sleep; but those memories are faint or vivid, broken and uncertain, according to my mood of mind; and strange it is that they come to me more in dreams by night than thoughts by day, especially as I grow older."

"I should like to have some such dreams, but

then I have nothing to remember ; I know not even my own age or when I came here," said Ivan thoughtfully. " If I do dream by night, I seem to hear only what I hear by day—the voices of the Cossack sentinels, the screams of the sea-birds, the dashing of the waves when the wind crosses the lake, or the clanging of the castle bell. Then there are times when I dream that I see Demetrius, and then I awake in a cold perspiration. Tell me of the things that are being acted in the great world that lies beyond the Lake of Ladoga, for Father Chrysostom speaks to me only of Heaven."

" It is said that the King of Prussia has agreed to the proposal of—of—the Empress, about the county of Wirtemberg, in Silesia."

" How, agreed ?"

" Count Biron is to have the estate as Duke of Courland, on paying eight thousand guineas to Field-Marshal Count Munich," said Balgonie.

The Prince sighed with a bewildered air, for all those names were quite new to him.

" And who is Count Biron ?" he asked.

" A friend of the Empress," said Father Chrysostom rather hastily, to anticipate the reply of Balgonie.

" Tell me something more. Nay, Father Chrysostom, don't chide us, pray," said he, seeing that the white bearded chaplain looked uneasy and rose to retire.

" Conversation of this kind is strictly for-

bidden," said he; "and if Captain Vlasfief was here——"

"Oh!" exclaimed the Prince, with a shudder, but not of anger (he seemed too gentle for that emotion), "don't talk of Vlasfief I implore you. Pray tell me more news, Hospodeen; I shall learn all the names in time, and try to remember them."

"There are strange tidings from Warsaw," replied Balgonie, who began to get bewildered and knew not on what to converse, if the most simple topics of the day were forbidden; "a battle has been fought at Slonim, between Prince Radzivil and the Russians, who defeated him after a five hours' engagement, and the Princess Radzivil, who is newly married and remarkably beautiful, fought on horseback among the Polish troops."

"Ah, Demetrius fought on horseback too," said the Prince, as if speaking to himself, and a gesture of undisguised impatience escaped the chaplain; "pray tell me something more, for no one ever speaks of such things to me."

"A new theatre has been opened at St. Petersburg," replied Balgonie (who thought to himself, "the devil is in it, if I cannot speak of *that!*"), "and there was represented an opera, entitled *Charles the Great.*"

"Ah, I don't quite understand all that; say it again."

Indeed, Balgonie might as well have spoken of carbonic gas or the Atlantic cable, had he ever

heard of such things; for the mind of the young Prince could not comprehend the most simple matters of every day-life. This was merely the result of his entire seclusion; but the adherents of the Empress, her favourites and lovers, industriously circulated through Russia the report that he was in a state of idiocy.

"And this place that you spoke of?" he resumed enquiringly.

"The theatre?"

"Yes, Hospodeen; who lives in it?"

"One of the actresses performed a magnificent cantata, in honour of the Empress."

"Ah! 'tis she, I understand, who keeps me here," said the Prince, with a sad smile; and now in real terror, and quite repenting the introduction he had brought about, Father Chrysostom rose to hurry Balgonie away.

As they were retiring, the Prince said:—

"Hospodeen, you have dropped something."

It was the locket with Natalie's hair.

"What is in this?" asked Ivan, with childlike interest.

"A lock of hair, your Highness."

"How odd! and you wear it, just as I wear my cross?"

"It is the gift, the souvenir of a lady I love, and who loves me: a countrywoman of your own."

"A woman?" said Ivan, ponderingly.

"Yes, Excellency."

"I have never looked upon a woman's face,

and know not what it is like, though the Empress (whom God long preserve!) visited me when a child, as I have been told. I have heard that they are not bearded like men. I shall never see one, it is forbidden; yet—yet—as I often tell Father Chrysostom, I have dreams by day—dreams of something else than wild swans and bearded Cossacks—of something to cling to, some one to love and be loved by. It must be this kind of love you speak of—oh yes, it must!” said Ivan, as he gazed with stupid, but reverent wonder at the lock of hair, ere he returned it to Balgonie.

“Poor young Prince!” exclaimed the latter, as the chaplain hurried him away, and the portcullis clanged behind them in its grooves of stone.

The priest now urged upon Balgonie, that if his visits were to be continued, the affairs of the outer world must in no way be referred to, or the result might be most disastrous for all concerned.

“The seclusion in which the prisoner is kept, has, I fear, impaired his understanding,” said Balgonie.

“Hah! do you think so?” grunted Colonel Bernikoff, who overheard the remark, as they issued from the tower of Ivan. “You must know, that your genuine Russian is like a tiger, as some writer has it—a tiger who licks the hand of his keeper, so long as he is chained; but who tears him asunder when loose. The Empress quite understands this!”

“How is it that you intrust me so freely to

visit your prisoner?" asked Charlie, who began to fear that Bernikoff might be laying some snare for him, by according this hitherto unwonted permission.

"Do you really wish to know?"

- "Yes, Colonel—why I in particular—I only?"

"Because you are the safest man in Russia to have this liberty."

"How?"

"As a soldier of fortune,—a stranger among us,—you can have no sympathy with anything but the strict and steady execution of your duty; and the line of that," added Bernikoff, darting a keen glance at the Scot, "as with us all, lies in fidelity to the Empress."

"True," replied Balgonie, with something of sadness in his tone, and very little of enthusiasm.

"Thus, were I to order you to blow Ivan Antonovitch from the mouth of a cannon, I should expect you to obey!"

"I trust that no such test of my obedience will ever be necessary," replied Balgonie, with a hauteur which Bernikoff was somewhat unused to see among his subordinates.

"We shall have some other and more troublesome prisoners in Schlussemburg ere long," said the Governor, with knitted brows.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Old Count Mierowitz and his family. Warrants have been issued by the Chancellor to arrest them all."

"All!" said Balgonie, in a faint voice.

"Yes, women as well as men: an escort of the Regiment of Smolensko arrived at St. Petersburg yesterday with the Count and the Hospoza Mario-lizza. His daughter, who seems to be deeply involved in some plot, has for the time effected her escape. But they will soon be all before the Secret Chancery, and then the knout and the wheel will be at work with a vengeance!"

The reader may judge how these and similar remarks affected poor Charlie, while the Governor, as if pleased that he could thus inflict pain, walked away with a malicious smile on his sombre visage, cramming tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

There were times, however, when the captive Prince, after his acquaintance with Balgonie, was a little less resigned, and had strange longings to see something of the great world that lay beyond his prison walls, and the waves that lashed them; to see other faces than those of the fierce and bearded Tchernemoski and Volga Cossacks who guarded him; a longing even to do something great and daring, to be remembered in after years with love and reverence; to be remembered, as he said, "in tradition, like Demetrius." Then, feeling all the utter hopelessness of such new aspirations, he would strive to be contented, to repeat with fresh energy the daily prayers set for him by Father Chrysostom, and to be grateful for life, lest he should die even as Demetrius died.

"Who is this Demetrius, of whom he con-

stantly speaks, and whose fate he fears so much may be his own?" asked Balgonie one day.

"It is an old, but a strange and terrible story," replied the chaplain. "When Ivan Basilovitch died about the end of the sixteenth century, his widow was banished to Northern Russia by the new Czar Feodor, whose Prime Minister urged that he could never reign in peace or security unless he imitated the Turks by sacrificing all who were nearly allied to the throne; so he exiled his mother, as I have said, and ordered an officer to assassinate his younger brother Demetrius.

"The officer, being a humane man, was filled with horror on receiving an order so barbarous; but fearing alike to disobey, or to leave the terrible task to be fulfilled by one less scrupulous, he took the child with him to a remote district, travelling many days' journey from Moscow. Then he wrote some words indelibly on the skin of the little Prince, tied a cross of brilliants about his neck, laid him at the door of a peasant's hut, and galloped away.

"To the tyrant Feodor he gave a circumstantial detail of how and where he had killed the infant Prince, and sought the promised reward.

"*'Receive it thus!'*" replied Feodor, who plunged a sword into his heart, the further to suppress all proof of guilt.

"The young tyrant died of a poison administered by his Chancellor, and others inherited his

crown ; but all to perish miserably in succession. And no less than four pretenders all appeared, each calling himself Demetrius, to contest for the throne ; and all the land was deluged with blood.

“Some twenty years after the alleged death of the brother of Ivan, a young Cossack of the Volga was bathing in that river with some of his companions, who saw with surprise that he had chained round his neck a cross of brilliants, and that certain words in the old Muscovite character were pricked upon his back. They were examined by a neighbouring priest and found to be—

‘ This is Demetrius, son of the Czar. ’

“Then all exclaimed that the true Demetrius had been found at last, and that a miracle from Heaven had saved him. His life was soon in peril, so he fled to Holstein, the Duke of which, after keeping him long in prison, sold him to the Emperor Michael, by whom he was savagely quartered alive. And it is the fate of this hapless heir of Russia, whose story he thinks in some points resembles his own (although he really knows but little of his own annals), that haunts the unfortunate Ivan in his gloomiest hours.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRATKIR.

With evident suspicion and mistrust, Bernikoff viewed the growing intimacy between his prisoner Ivan and the Scottish Captain; and though he neither recommended that it should cease or interdicted it, as he might and perhaps ought to have done, he made many mental notes thereof.

Though Balgonie sympathised with Ivan to the fullest extent, he knew too well the danger of doing more; and he felt that he had his own share of secret sorrow and anxiety, and might yet have greater to endure. The girl he loved with all the strength of a first and romantic passion was already a political fugitive; her father and cousin were prisoners, and perhaps in chains; her brother and his kinsman, Usakoff, already viewed as criminals; and with the terrors of despotism hanging over them all.

Natalie a fugitive—and where? In the wild forests, perhaps, where wolves and outlaws lurked: what perils and privations might she not be suffering! Natalie so delicate, so pure, so gently nurtured, and so highly bred.

Balgonie was aware, also, that intimacy with

the family of Count Mierowitz, and the deep interest he had in their fate, was fraught with personal peril to himself in such a land of tyranny as Russia. Full of such thoughts as these one forenoon, he was leaning on a cannon in one of those deep embrasures of the fortress which faced the drawbridge communicating with the land. The guard was in the act of lowering the bridge to permit a man to pass out. This person was just parting from Bernikoff, with whom he had been for some time in close and earnest conversation, and from whom he was evidently receiving money—an unusual circumstance, as that distinguished field-officer generally lavished more kicks and cuffs than thanks or kopecs.

On beholding this man, as he bowed humbly, cap in hand, cross the bridge and disappear among the houses of the town beyond, Balgonie experienced a species of nervous shock. He could not doubt that this fellow, so gigantic in stature and powerful in muscular development, in the coarse caftan and leathern girdle, with the long lock of grizzled hair dangling behind his right ear, was Nicholas Paulovitch, the murderer of Podatchkine, the gipsy woodman, and the swindling mendicant of the barrier at the Neva.

“This man here in Schlusselburg,” thought Balgonie, with indignation and alarm; “here in earnest conversation with Bernikoff! The spirit of mischief seems to pervade the air again!”

A few minutes afterwards the Cossack Jagouski

who, as related, had been so severely knouted by Bernikoff for pilfering a pipeful of tobacco, came forward with tottering steps, and looking painfully thin and feeble from recent suffering; and with the crouching bearing of the Muscovite towards a superior, said that his Excellency the Governor wished to speak with him in his quarters, whither Balgonie at once repaired, after having, as military etiquette required, buckled on his sword.

“Carl Ivanovitch,” said Bernikoff, who certainly had rather a perturbed air, “some suspicious characters are in our vicinity, and have actually been hovering in boats about the fortress. What think you of that?”

“Suspicious characters, Excellency—how?”

“In a *Tratkir* of the town, one dropped this coin—a silver rouble of the prisoner Ivan—Ivan the Unknown Person. To possess one, unless as I do *this*, for proof of treason, is to court death or Siberia.”

“And from whom had you this?”

“A spy,” replied the Colonel curtly.

“The man who has just left you?”

“The same.”

“Nicholas Paulovitch,” continued Balgonie, with increasing astonishment at the other’s coolness; “the assassin of the Corporal—the wretch of whom I told you when I first arrived here!”

“All that may, or may not be,” replied Bernikoff, with a stern air, almost amounting to

rudeness : "when I require this devil of a fellow no more, you may impale him, if you please ; but molest him not at present."

"I do not see, Excellency, that all this in any way concerns me," said Balgonie haughtily, as he lifted his hat, and put his sabre under his arm, as if about to retire.

"It does concern you thus far. I shall anticipate any attempt that be made by those lurkers, whoever they may be. You must remember," he added, lowering his voice, "the tenor of the dispatch you brought me?"

"Perfectly," replied Charlie, in a somewhat faint voice, as he knew not how terrible or repugnant might be the duty assigned him by this military despot.

"Well, you shall pass forth into the town to-night, with a patrol of twenty men, armed with sabres and carbines. Surround and search the *Tratkir* in the main street, and compel all therein, who seem suspicious, to produce their papers; and if they are without such, bring them to *me*, and I shall question them in a fashion of my own."

By the laws of Russia, at that time, persons could not travel from St. Petersburg, or even from place to place, without a passport, describing their occupation, appearance, and route, which they were not at liberty to alter; and in the rural districts, travellers required a pass from the lord whose estate they may have been upon, before they were at liberty to quit it. Without such a

document, no one would dare to furnish them with food or shelter, nor could a postmaster give them horses, however high their rank, or great their offer of reward—to such complete subjection had the system of accepted despotism reduced the people.

“And I am to take twenty men with me?” said Balgonie, after an unpleasant pause.

“Yes! the bridge will be lowered for you after sunset. Whoever these lurkers are, they have been seen and overheard; and this coin is proof sufficient to warrant the transportation of a whole province. Be they who they may, by every dome in sacred Mother Moscow, they shall find *me* ready for them!”

And Bernikoff grimly touched his small dagger, a species of weapon which a Russian officer is seldom or never without, even in the present day; and when Charlie Balgonie remembered how that same dagger had been thrust into the throat of the half-strangled Peter III., a flush of indignant hate and aversion crossed his honest face. To him it was evident that the spirit of mischief or malevolence made Bernikoff select him, as one whom he suspected of a friendly interest in the family of Count Mierowitz, for this unpleasant duty, instead of Captain Vlasfief, the Lieutenant of Schlusselfburg, or any other officer, who must have been better acquainted with the adjacent town and all its places of entertainment, than he, a total stranger, could ever be.

But he was a soldier; he had no resource but to obey in silence; and an angry sigh escaped him, as he stuck his loaded pistols in his girdle, when the sun sank behind the green painted roofs of the wooden town, and the evening gun boomed from the ramparts across the Lake of Ladoga.

Defiling in the twilight through the streets of Schlusselfburg, he marched straight to where he knew that the principal *Tratkir*, or tea-house, was situated; and while his heart sank within him in fear of *whom* he might arrest,—perhaps Natalie herself,—he at once surrounded the building, to prevent all egress, and to the evident alarm and perturbation of all who were within.

These tea-houses are no longer to be found in the capital of Russia now, for there all the *restaurants* are constituted and arranged upon the French and German models; but they still exist in Moscow and elsewhere; and under their roofs, the genuine Muscovite consumes what would seem a fabulous amount of the Chinese plant. They are chiefly the resort of soldiers, porters, and droski drivers, all of whom must behave in a polite and orderly manner while there. All must enter the great room where the tea is served, cap in hand, alike out of respect for the company, and to the holy pictures, Souzdal daubs of SS. Sergius, Alexander Newski, and so forth, which decorate the walls; and all must salute the bar-keeper, after first saluting the Holy Image, which is to be found in every Russian apart-

ment, and before which, a lamp of train oil is frequently burning.

When the crooked sabres of the dismounted Cossacks were seen flashing in the porch, and when Balgonie entered with his sword drawn, passing along the narrow way between the numerous tables, at which the groups were seated, amid an oppressive odour of strong tea, coarse tobacco, and Russian leather from boots, caps, and girdles; many a peasant in his canvas caftan, and many a stout moujik in his fur shoubah, felt his heart quail with apprehension, he knew not of what; and every saucer—the tea is not drunk from cups—was set down untasted, while one or two men nearly choked themselves with their lumps of sugar; for usually it is not put into the tea, but is retained in the mouth of the drinker, so that, in a spirit of economy, the poor Muscovite may indulge in two, perhaps three cups of his favourite beverage, and use thereto but one piece of sugar.

For his intrusion Balgonie apologised; this, though a very unusual proceeding in a country so despotic, failed to reassure the tea drinkers, who were all hushed in silence and expectation; and a girl who had been singing for their amusement, crouched down in a corner for concealment.

Balgonie counted the number of persons in the Tratkir, and noted the exact hour by his watch; he then proceeded, with a heart full of anxiety and dread, to examine each person in succession,

in reality looking for those he had no wish to find.

All who possessed the requisite papers, showed them; others proved, all in succession, to be soldiers in uniform, moujiks, and droski drivers, with their brass badges, sailors, and serfs; thus, after a time, a load seemed to be lifted from the mind of the young officer. As he turned to leave the apartment without a prisoner, the Cossack Jagouski rather roughly dragged the singing girl from the nook where she had sought concealment, and then Balgonie recognised the fine dark face, the black eyes, and the large glittering ear-rings of Olga Paulowna, the gipsy girl whom he had befriended at Louga—she who saved him from a terrible fate in the forest.

“Let the girl go free, Jagouski,” said Balgonie; “I shall answer for her if required.”

Olga drew a paper from her bosom and showed that it was her passport from the Commandant of Krejko, permitting her to travel to and from Schlusselfurg.

Jagouski saluted and withdrew a few paces; and now, as if the cloud of doubt and dread Balgonie’s arrival had cast over all was dispersed, again the noisy hum of voices pervaded the long room of the tea-house, and laughter even broke forth at intervals.

“Olga,” said Balgonie, “you here—so far from home?”

“Yes, Hospodeen, for my home is anywhere,

or wherever night finds me ; but I have news for you."

" News—and for me ?"

" Yes," said she, sinking her voice to a whisper ;
" I have news of Natalie Mierowna——"

" Hush, for heaven's sake, girl !—hush !" said Balgonie with a nervous start.

" She is here——"

" Here in this house ?"

" No, Hospodeen."

" Where then ?—oh, speak quickly !"

" In the neighbourhood of Schlusselfburg."

Charlie felt his heart die within him at this intelligence, for such a vicinity was full of peril.

" Be to-morrow at noon on the road that leads to Tosna, and you shall learn more ; but do you know it, Hospodeen ?"

" I shall soon discover it—and the place ?"

" The skirts of the wood four versts from this."

" Good—till then, adieu ; and God be with you."

Balgonie retired all unaware or heedless that his Cossacks were secretly jesting at his whispering with the pretty gipsy ; and through the dark streets he marched them towards the great and sombre masses of the fort which loomed between him and the star-lighted sky, his heart the while being literally sick with alarm and dismay, in the conviction that the long-dreaded crisis was coming—that Natalie was near, and the place of her concealment was known to a vagrant gipsy girl, the

sister of Nicholas Paulovitch, who, if he knew it not already, might wrest the secret from her with the point of his knife, for the information of him whose spy he was—the hateful Bernikoff!

Ruin and sorrow were close at hand, indeed.

On receiving the official but verbal report of Balgonie, and learning that the visit to the identical tea-house where the dangerous rouble was found had proved abortive, and that there was no one to be knouted or hanged in the morning, Colonel Bernikoff became transported with rage, and lifted his cane somewhat threateningly. On this, Balgonie's hand was instantly laid on the hilt of his sword.

“Beware, Excellency,” said he firmly: “a blow to an equal is a foul insult; to an inferior it is mean tyranny; and, in either instance, blood alone should wash it out.”

On this the Colonel's rage assumed a new phase; he trod on his cocked hat, and ordered the wax candles which he had always burning before the image of his patron, St. Sergius, to be extinguished. He loaded the effigy with the bitterest reproaches, and for that night left the poor saint in total darkness, despite the intercession of Father Chrysostom.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOOD OF THE HONEY TREE.

THE noon of the following day saw Charlie Balgonie—after an anxious and almost sleepless night—proceeding on foot along the road that leads southward to Tosna, a little town which stands on a stream of the same name, a tributary of the Neva, but some thirty versts distant from Schlus-selburg.

His military ardour was already fading, so far as the Russian service was concerned, amid his pressing anxiety for the dangers that menaced Natalie; and he felt himself only a species of serf in an imperial uniform. Unlike the Admirals Douglas, Mackenzie, Count Balmaine, and hundreds of other Scotsmen who served the Empress by sea and land, he had thoughtlessly omitted to stipulate, as they had more warily done, that he was to be at perfect liberty, as a British subject, to return to his native land whenever he felt disposed to do so. The poor friendless boy—the kidnapped palatine, who had been rescued from the burning wreck of the *Piscatona*, while floating adrift in the North Sea—could know little how necessary such stipulations were when he joined

the Regiment of Smolensko as a cadet; and now he felt himself literally a military slave of the ambitious and lascivious Catharine II.

Before him rose the tall fir trees of the forest where he was to meet Olga—the Wood of the Honey Tree, as it was named from an episode (related by Demetrius, the ambassador, in his History of Muscovy) which occurred to a serf of Bernikoff's, Alexis Jagouski, father of the same man whom he slew so wickedly and ungratefully in the flight from Zorndorf; and the whole anecdote reads so very like one of the adventures of Baron Munchausen, or Sir Jonah Barrington's "bounces," that we may be pardoned translating it here.

"This man," says Demetrius, "when seeking honey, got into a hollow tree, where the bees had concealed such a quantity thereof, that it sucked him up to the breast, and being unable to extricate himself, he subsisted for two day upon honey alone, and finding that his shouts were answered only by the echoes of the vast forest, he began to despair of being freed from his sweet captivity. At last, to his terror, there came a large brown bear from the Neva, to eat of the honey which the old tree contained, and of which these animals are greedily fond. As the bear was descending with hinder part foremost, the poor serf caught hold of his loins. This sudden grasp among his fur so terrified the bear, that he started and fled, and in doing so, drew the peasant from that sweet prison, which otherwise had proved his grave: hence

was the forest named, the Wood of the Honey Tree."

There, as Balgonie approached, all was still save the voice of the valdchnep, or woodcock, and the hum of insects ; he lingered for a few minutes on the outskirts, just where the highway to Tosna dipped down into a deep and gloomy dingle of intertwisted branches, which formed a species of leafy tunnel overhead.

Three miles distant to the northward, he could see the place he had left, the gloomy Castle of Schlusselfburg, moated round by the Neva and Lake of Ladoga, jutting into the latter on its rock, its towers wearing a sombre brown tint even in the noonday sunshine, as if no light could brighten them ; and the white flag of Russia was fluttering on the summit of the keep, where Ivan was pining away the years of youth in silence and seclusion.

Balgonie heard a voice waking the echoes of the dingle ; three notes were struck on a tambourine, as a signal to him, and Olga approached singing a verse of that prophetic song, which is so soothing to Russian military and religious vanity :—

" But when the hundredth year
Shall three times doubled be ;
Then shall the end appear
Of all our slavery.
Then shall the warlike powers
From distant climes return,
Egypt again be ours,
While the Turkish domes shall burn ! "

" I have kept my appointment, Olga,"

"And I mine," she replied gaily, while tripping towards him in a playful manner; "now follow me, Hospodeen, and I shall take you to those who will be right glad to see you."

"First let us be sure that we are unwatched."

"Right," said she; and stooping in her earnestness, her keen, dark, and glittering eyes swept the whole landscape that lay between the wood and Schlüsselburg, and glanced keenly beyond the stems of the trees into the dingles and vistas; but, save the birds on the branches and the gnats revolving in the sunshine, no living thing was visible.

"Follow me, Hospodeen," said the gipsy; "we have not far to go."

They descended into the dark dingle, or hollow, and then quitted the highway; Olga gathering up her skirts that she might tread with greater facility among the thick gorse and long rank grass, displaying, as she did so, two very handsome and taper ankles cased in scarlet stockings with elaborate clocks of yellow braid.

She explained to Balgonie that, as there was no path to guide them, her chief clues were a set of notches, cut to all appearance carelessly, as if with a woodman's axe, on the bark of the great pine trees.

"These marks seem fresh, and recently cut—who made them?" asked Balgonie.

"The Hospodeen, Basil Mierowitz," she whispered.

"Poor Basil!" responded Charlie, in a low tone.

After toiling through the dense forest for more than half an hour, pausing ever and anon to listen and watch whether they were observed, they arrived at the foot of a grey granite cliff, the face of which was screened, or nearly covered, by masses of depending ivy, creepers, and green lichens, forming a background which, at a little distance, blended with the greenery of the woods.

"We have arrived," said she, turning, with a flush on her dark face which made it radiantly beautiful. She struck three strokes on her tambourine, and shook its bells.

Charlie thought of her kinsman, Nicholas Paulovitch, and instinctively grasped one of the pistols at his girdle, on seeing the dark and bearded face of a man appear among the ivy leaves some twenty feet above him. A rope ladder was lowered, and whatever doubts or misgivings were in his mind, he felt himself constrained now to go through the adventure to its end.

He clambered up, and on the great screen of ivy being lifted aside, found himself face to face with his old friend Basil Mierowitz, the subaltern of his company, who, grasping both his hands with kindly warmth of manner, led him into a cavern or grotto, one of a series of many, into which the granite rocks had there been hollowed by some long past convulsion of nature.

Another hand was instantly laid on his,—a smaller and softer one,—and two beautiful dark eyes were bending tenderly on his face.

“Natalie!” he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice, and would have pressed her to his breast, but for the presence of Basil and several other men.

Amid the twilight of the cavern, he could perceive its rough natural walls and arch, with hazy but sunny rays that streamed faintly in the background, athwart the obscurity, as if the vault communicated with other galleries in the rock, through which the upper light of day stole in by the crannies and chasms. He was also enabled to see, that with Natalie, her brother Basil, and her cousin Usakoff, who had been a Lieutenant of the Valikolutz Grenadiers, there were about twenty men in the place, all clad in sheepskin shoubahs, canvas doublets, or the caftan, the invariable dress of the Russian peasant, and nearly all had red serge breeches, rough boots, and girdles of rope or untanned leather.

Though attired like woodmen or labouring serfs, all these men had unmistakably the bearing of well-trained soldiers: all were strong, active, and resolute in aspect; and Balgonie had no doubt that they were those natives of the Ukraine, the deserters from the Livonian frontier, of whom Bernikoff had spoken; for against the walls of the cavern were ranged a number of muskets and bayonets, with sets of accoutrements, sabres, and pistols. There, too, stood a regimental drum,

decorated with the imperial arms, and the forbidden name of the Emperor *Ivan* !

Every moment seemed to increase the perils that surrounded the luckless Balgonie, for now he was in the very den of the conspirators.

All carried in their girdles a dagger or knife and double brace of pistols. They seemed to be chiefly soldiers of the Regiment of Valikolutz: and his sudden appearance among them, in the full uniform of the Smolensko Infantry, evidently excited, if it did not alarm them; for discipline becomes so completely a habit—a second nature; and, as if the presence of an epaulette rendered them uneasy, they all withdrew into the back or more obscure portion of the cavern, leaving him and their two leaders together.

“ Oh ! Basil—Usakoff—my friends, if indeed I may yet dare to call you so, and live,” said Balgonie, in a voice that was broken by emotion, “ for what rash and dreadful purpose do I find you and these unfortunate fellows here ? ”

“ You, and all Russia too, shall learn ere long,” replied Mierowitz calmly and sternly, yet with a grave and noble air, with which his coarse canvas caftan assorted oddly.

“ And poor Natalie ! ” exclaimed Balgonie, in a tone of grief and reproach ; “ have you no pity for her ? ”

“ Until Natalie informed me, I knew not, my friend, Carl Ivanovitch, that *you* were the bearer of that secret dispatch, which might have cost

you limb or life, when it was too late to arrest those I had set upon your track."

"Well, certainly, I was not much indebted to the good offices of your rogue, Podatchkine."

"The Corporal's orders were simply to abstract the document, and bring it to me; not to slay its bearer, unless such a catastrophe became unavoidable."

"He fell into his own snare—a dark and deadly one."

"Happily you escaped it; and I have saved two hundred silver roubles, for the service of the Emperor."

"Who do you mean?" asked Balgonie, in a whisper.

"Ivan—the Prisoner of Schlusselfburg!" exclaimed Usakoff, with enthusiasm.

"Alas!" added Balgonie, "you court but your own destruction."

"Think not so; but join us, and share our perils and our glory," replied the other.

"I am bound by allegiance to the Empress."

"You are but a tool in her hands, Carl Balgonie."

"Perhaps so; but one with a devilish sharp edge, I hope," replied Balgonie, who felt only genuine sorrow; and a silence of nearly a minute ensued.

The manner and voice of Basil Mierowitz were singularly soft and winning, yet he was bold and resolute; and though a young man, he had all the free and easy bearing of a courtly soldier,

blended with something of the calm severity of a priest—a manner that was very impressive.

The Polish and Cossack blood that mingled in the veins of Apollo Usakoff gave a freer and bolder, perhaps a wilder, bearing and style of language; his nose was aquiline, and expressed fierceness of disposition; yet his features otherwise were essentially delicate and noble, and his eyes were strangely beautiful in colour and variety of expression. They were dark grey, encircled by a ring of light, clear brown; and when he spoke, or became excited, the iris contracted and expanded, as the blood flowed and ebbed in his fiery and enthusiastic heart, for he was a grandson of the Hetman Mazeppa—that Pole, whose story is so well known, and who, after being bound naked on a wild and maddened horse, to punish him for having an intrigue with a noble lady of his own country, was carried by his steed through woods and wastes, and herds of wolves and bears, into the heart of the Ukraine, where he lived to become the prince and leader of those wild Cossacks who dwell upon the banks of the Dnieper.

Sleeping in a cavern, among rough soldiers, on a bed of dried leaves and moss, had not improved either the costume or the appearance of Natalie Mierowna. With pain and sorrow,—almost with agony,—Charlie Balgonie could perceive how her once rich dress of yellow silk, with its trimmings of narrow ermine, was faded and soiled—even tattered and worn; her laces and her soft hair

alike dishevelled and uncared for; and that already had a hunted and haggard expression been imparted to her beautiful eyes, and soft, pale, delicate face. Anger and pride alone remained; but both were for a time subdued by the sudden presence of Balgonie, and the love she was compelled to repress outwardly, at least, when before so many eyes.

Katinka, the sturdy Polish attendant, who loved Natalie dearly, alone seemed unimpaired by the hardships of a forest life.

"Concerning the secret dispatch of the woman, Catharine Christianowna, to the Governor of Schlusselfburg," said Usakoff, resuming the subject of conversation, "you, Carl, are perhaps aware of its contents?"

"Yes," replied Balgonie, and then paused.

"Say on, my friend," said Usakoff; "we can hear anything now."

"They were to the effect, that a scheme had been formed to free the Unknown Person in Schlusselfburg, and that he was not to be permitted to fall *alive into the hands of any one who came to seek him.*"

"Savage orders, which there can be no mistaking."

"Orders which Bernikoff is quite capable of fulfilling," added Mierowitz in a sad and stern voice, while their listening followers burst into low and whispered, but fierce imprecations against the Empress.

"Bernikoff is a man without one human sympathy," said Basil.

"And no marvel is it?" exclaimed Usakoff, while the strange light already described gleamed in his dark grey eyes; "his mother, like a true Tartar woman, is said to have anointed her breasts daily with blood, as she suckled him, even as Dion tells us the mother of Caligula did, that her child might, in manhood, be merciless."

Vlasief they stigmatised as "the son of a goat," being originally a boy of the great founding Hospital at Moscow, where, when the increase of children became so great that nurses could not be found, the lacteal food of animals was introduced, and a herd of goats adopted as wet-nurses for the establishment.

"Carl," said Basil, taking the hand of Balgonie, "Natalie has told me all."

"All!"

"Yes—all that passed in Louga. Dear Natalie has never had a secret from me."

"And you forgive me?" said Balgonie earnestly.

"I do—but on this condition."

"Oh name it, Basil!"

"That if you do not join us, you will, at least, not actively oppose our scheme."

"I scarcely know what it is."

"Know this then," replied the other emphatically, yet softly, "that on its success depends the success of your love; for if it fails, then all our lives are lost!"

"You say that you love my cousin Natalie?" said young Usakoff, in a somewhat loftier tone.

"With all my heart—with all my soul, I do!" replied Balgonie, pressing a hand of Natalie between his own.

"Yet, Carl, if you valued generosity and loved pity—if you loved glory and honour, as a soldier should, you would risk the loss even of *her*,—yea, give her up, if necessary,—and join us!"

"What would either life or glory be after such a sacrifice? Ah, my friend, you never loved as I do!" replied Charlie, with some irritation of manner.

"Perhaps; but I have always thought how grandly terrible a figure was made by Mohammed the Great, when, on a stage, before his discontented army, he struck off the head of a favourite Sultana to convince his soldiers that he preferred glory to love."

"Cousin, cousin," said Natalie, who felt all the peril and delicacy of her lover's position, "you talk thus to-day, when last night you shed tears—yes, bitter tears for the loss of your sister. We were all taken prisoners together, Carl—my poor father, Mariolizza, and I. Bound with cords,—see, the marks are on me still," she added, showing her white wrists, while her dark eyes filled with a dusky fire,—“we were conveyed in a covered kabitka towards St. Petersburg, on the way to which it broke down, in a wood near Paulovsk, not far from the outer walls

of the imperial gardens. There, in the confusion, I was enabled to escape, by the aid of the gipsy girl Olga, who, hoping some such chance might occur, had followed us afoot from Louga; and through her further knowledge and assistance, I was enabled to join my brother Basil here."

"My dear old father—and my soft and tender Mariolizza—a blow must be rapidly struck, if we would save them from greater horrors than those they now endure!" exclaimed Basil: "the die has been cast now; and if I cannot save them and our legitimate Emperor, we can at least all perish together."

"Dangers menace you closely; the roads around the fortress are patrolled, and gun-boats watch the shores of the lake. A coin of Ivan found in a tea-house——"

"Malediction—yes! 'twas I, Carl, who dropped it there," exclaimed Basil: "well, and this coin?"

"Has roused all the suspicions of Bernikoff; and he knows that you and your cousin have deserted from your posts in Livonia."

"Already, does he know of this?"

"Yes, with many other details."

"Then," replied Basil Mierowitz, with growing sternness, "we have not an hour to lose. Who informed him?"

"Lieutenant-General Weymarn, by a special messenger, while I was loitering at Louga."

"So, so! By our Lady of Kazan, we must be

prompt in action. I have cruised thrice round Schlusselfburg disguised as a fisherman, and know well all the approaches."

"Basil, Usakoff, I implore you by all you hold dear on earth and sacred in Heaven to pause while there is yet time—to abandon your wild scheme, and make your peace, if possible, with the Empress."

"You were right to add 'if possible,' my friend," replied the other calmly but bitterly. "Already compromised by desertion, my father and betrothed wife chained in a fortress by the Neva, what terms would Catharine offer us? Carl Ivanovitch," he added, with a lofty smile, "I do not press you to join us, or seek to lure you into the dangers of an enterprise the enthusiasm of which you cannot share. I do not seek even to turn your presence as a trusted staff officer in Schlusselfburg to account, though it might further our objects, and be the means, perhaps, by strategy, of saving many a valuable life. Still less do I desire to turn to account your intimacy with the young Emperor Ivan, though I envy you that great privilege. Even in the love I bear my sister (though it might tempt you to cast your lot with us—*with her* shall I say?), I leave you unquestioned and free."

"I thank you, Basil," said Balgonie sadly, and with a heightened colour, caused by irrepressible annoyance at the last remark of Mierowitz.

"But we have all sworn before the altar of our

Lady of Kazan, and the image of St. Sergius, to devote our lives to the matter in hand; so retreat is impossible—advice and entreaty alike unavailing.”

Balgonie felt an acute pang on hearing this; for he knew that in Russia no place was esteemed as more holy than the church of our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg. Around its shrine—the *sanctum sanctorum* of which no woman has ever entered—are the keys of conquered cities, the banners of a thousand slaughtered armies, and the bâtons and sabres of their leaders, the Frenchman, the Turk, the Pole, the Persian, and the Dane, the Swede and the German; and he knew, too, that no image, to the Muscovite mind, is more sacred than that of St. Sergius—the same absurd idol which the Kazan column bore with them at the battle of the Alma, and displayed in vain to the advancing bayonets of old Sir Colin’s Highland Brigade.

“The blow once struck,” resumed Basil, “we shall be joined by the Cossacks of the Ukraine and the Don, among whom we have many impatient adherents, and by all who hold of the Houses of Brunswick-Wolfenbützel, of Holstein Gottorp, and of all who *hate* Anhalt Zerbst; all Russia will soon follow, from the shores of the Black Sea to those of the White—from Revel to the Ural Mountains. We have not forgotten the reign of Elizabeth: how many noses were slit, how many foreheads were branded, how many ears cropped,

and tongues shortened, and how many eyes were darkened for ever during that time of tyranny; how many backs flayed by the knout; how many nobles banished to Siberia, or drowned in prison vaults by the swollen waters of the Neva. Pure nationality is dying now; but we must revive Russia—not as it is ruled by a lascivious woman and her jealous lovers, but Holy Russia of Peter the Great—strong, invincible, and the terror alike of the Eastern and Western world. Let us save our country from those who oppress it, and replace upon its throne the Grand Duke, the Czar—the Emperor Ivan; for the right given by God and by inheritance can never be destroyed!”

A murmur of applause from his followers succeeded this outburst (which we can render but feebly in English), and they clashed their weapons in approval, while, fired by her brother's energy, Natalie sung a verse of a well known Russian song:—

“Now, as of old, the sabre's ready,
And its might they'll feel afar,
When but three short words are utter'd,
God, our Country, and the Czar!”

“Without cannon, you cannot mean to assault a place so strong as Schlusselfurg, fortified as it has been by all the skill of Todleben?” said Balgonie, after a pause.

“Ask me not what we mean to do, Carl: for your own sake, my dear friend, the less you know of us, and of our plans, the better. We shall

come upon you all when you least expect us, and in that hour take no heed of what you see or hear. Mix yourself up with it as little as you can: if we fail, we perish in our failure; if we triumph, and Ivan is replaced upon his throne, be assured that Basil Mierowitz will not forget the lover of his sister—the comrade of many a brave and happy day with the Regiment of Smolensko. Now adieu—and come hither no more, lest your steps be watched.”

Balgonie pressed the hands of his two friends, whom he viewed as fated and foredoomed men; he kissed Natalie with a tenderness that was alike sorrowful and despairing, for he trembled in his heart lest he should never see her more; and, in another moment or so, like one in a bewildering dream, he had descended the rope ladder, and was traversing the forest—the Wood of the Honey Tree—forgetful or oblivious of whether he was watched or not.

He foresaw but woe and ruin now; and proceeded slowly back to Schlusselfburg, with his mind a prey to doubt, anxiety, and dread of what might be the sequel to the impending catastrophe. He felt assured of one thing only—that a deed, bold, reckless, and desperate, would be the result of his friend's desertion from Livonia, their political rancour, and personal desire for vengeance on the Empress and her favourites.

In that deed, and its too probable failure, he foresaw the destruction of his love; and he felt

bitterly that rather than have known and lost Natalie, it would have been better had fate drowned him when the Palatine ship was burned, or shot him when warring in Silesia!

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOUBT AND DREAD.

NEARLY all the events which followed the secret visit of Balgonie to the conspirators will be found in the more recent histories of Russia, and in the manifestoes published by the Empress Catharine at the time—especially her *oukaz* subsequent to the revolt of Basil Mierowitz.

On returning to Schlusselfurg, Balgonie found the Governor, Colonel Bernikoff, in a very bad humour indeed. The Grand Chancellor had recently sent him a prisoner, with a note to the effect that he wrote verses, and was otherwise a dangerous fellow—to keep him for a week or two, and then get rid of him. He had thrice sent to the Chancellor, to learn under what name the man was to be *buried*, for the fellow was dead now—so much had the damp atmosphere of the lower vaults disagreed with his poetical temperament; but no answer had been returned, which was very annoying. So Bernikoff, whose patience was never very extensive, was furious; but he strove to soothe his ruffled feelings by several enormous pinches of the sharp snuff of Beresovski, from the box which—as we have before hinted—had been

found in the fob of the late Peter III. ; and by batooning, or beating with his cane, the Cossack Jagouski, whom he had suddenly detected in the act of praying secretly before the little image of St. Sergius, which was his—Colonel Bernikoff's—own peculiar and particular property.

By the old laws of Muscovy, to be found worshipping at an image, erected by, or the property of another, designing thereby to have a share in the favour of the saint it represented, without being at any expense, was punishable by a fine, to refund "the owner some part of the money laid out for the said image;" but as the poor Cossack had not a copper *densusca* wherewith to bless himself, the Governor took it out of his back and shoulders (scarcely healed after his recent knouting), with the aid of a knotted walking cane.

" 'To steal and to lie,' according to Bulharyn, a famous Russian writer, 'are the two auxiliary verbs of our language,' " said the Colonel, panting with exertion, as the Cossack crept away with a glance of subdued ferocity in his stealthy eyes; "we take all that for granted; but this slave has been stealing the interest of my saint for himself!"

He ordered an extra supply of wax candles to be lighted before the image, and then he knelt, bowed, and muttered:—

"Holy St. Sergius, heed not the prayers of that rascal, he is only a vile serf, a slave, a Cossack from the Ukraine. Thou hast been very good to me, and

shalt be treated handsomely. Candles of the finest wax shall burn before thee all night. I will love and pray for thee, so do thou protect and intercede for me, most holy Sergius !”

And so he prayed till the dinner drum beat; and then, muttering an oath as he tripped over his sabre, the old savage hobbled away, to commit at least two of the seven deadly sins at table.

“No tidings yet, Carl Ivanovitch, of those traitors !” said Bernikoff, when he had somewhat recovered his breath, after a deep draught of quass, the froth of which adhered to his grisly mustachio : “the Captain Vlasfief, and my faithful friend Tschekin, with forty picked Cossacks, and a clever guide——”

“Nicholas Paulovitch, I presume.”

“The same,” continued Bernikoff, with a fierce grimace on his lips and a cruel leer in his eyes, as he masticated a huge mouthful of green *borsch* with beef and eggs ; “the same, sir,—and what then ?”

“Nothing, Excellency: but this *oukha* of sterlet is excellent. Well, these and the forty Cossacks——”

“Are scouring all the roads between this and St. Petersburg on one flank, and between this and North Ladoga on the other ; so the cursed Asiatics cannot escape me.”

“Who will betray them to you ?” asked Balgonie, making a terrible effort to appear calm and unconcerned, as he played with his sword

knot and the tassels of his sash, and forgot to eat

“Who?” exclaimed Bernikoff, grinding his teeth, and eating very fast. “Their own friends—their own dear comrades—adherents, which you will. Russia is full of people, yea of many nations. The Empress can reckon her faithful slaves by millions; yet, when a Russian hath his hat on his head, its rim contains the only friend on whom he can rely.”

“This is a severe libel on your country surely, Excellency.”

“’Tis truth though; so Basil Mierowitz, Usakoff, and the rest, are all doomed men. No one was ever lost on a straight road; thus the soldier who diverges from the straight line of duty must speedily find himself face to face with degradation and death. Punishment to those traitors will be swift and sure! So, I only fear that the Grand Chancellor will never give me the pleasure of having them under my judicious care in Schlussemburg. We have certain old vaults, built below the tide mark by Ivan the Terrible, for some of those people of Novgorod who leagued with the King of Poland. They are always full of fog; and I am curious to know how long an able-bodied prisoner might live there, or rather how long he would be in dying. But excuse me, Hospodeen, I confess me to-morrow, and there rings the bell for vespers already;” and making many Greek signs of the cross and other genuflexions, Bernikoff, after having gorged himself

at table, hurried away to the chapel, where Father Chrysostom officiated.

Charlie gladly sought the solitude afforded by the stockades and outworks of the fortress on the side towards the Lake of Ladoga. There, as elsewhere, was of course, a chain of sentinels; but they did not interrupt his lonely communing with himself.

By his interest in Natalie, by his deep love for her, and more than all, perhaps, by his recent visit and interview, he already felt himself “art and part” (to use a Scottish legal phrase), or *particeps criminis*, with the rash adherents of Ivan. If one of these deserted the cause in which they had embarked, then would their lurking place be at once discovered, and the story of his recent visit be revealed.

He dreaded lest Bernikoff and others suspected his friendly interest in the family of Count Mierowitz, and that more might yet be learned of it; thus he would have experienced neither shock nor surprise, had he, at any hour, in that land of treachery and espionage, seen either Captain Vlasief, Lieutenant Tschekin, or any other officer of the fortress, advancing towards him sabre in hand, with an armed party, to demand his sword, to make him a prisoner, and march him off to the same prison which already held the old Count and Mariolizza, the innocent betrothed of Basil, and might soon hold another, who was dearer still — Natalie!

"If I love her," he would say to himself at times, "why should I shrink from sharing all that she suffers now—all she may yet endure? Yet it would be wiser to watch well for her sake, and seek to save, or bear her away; but how—and where to?" was the next bewildering thought.

And the generous Basil, the fiery and chivalrous Usakoff, oh that he might save them too! He mourned for Usakoff, who was the very soul of honour and heroism, the worthy grandson of that Mazeppa who, when Charles the XII. was retreating from Pultowa, swam the Borysthenes by the side of the fugitive king, and of whom the latter said in the words of the bard:—

"Of all our band,
Though firm of heart and strong of hand,
In skirmish, march, or forage, none
Can less have said or more have done
Than thee, Mazeppa! on the earth
So fit a pair had never birth,
Since Alexander's day till now,
As thy Bucephalus and thou;
All Scythia's fame to thine should yield,
For pricking on o'er flood and field."

So worthy of such an ancestor, was he, too, to perish?

This was, indeed, a miserable mood of mind in which to pass the nights and days of inactivity—of suspense and anxiety in which none could share, in that strong, guarded, and somewhat lonely fortress, which was washed, as we have said, on one side by the Neva, and on the other by the Lake of Ladoga, the very ripples of

whose waves sounded hatefully in the ears of Balgonie.

"Oh," thought he, "to be with Natalie on the side of a green and breezy Scottish mountain—on any part of the shore of free and happy Britain! to be with her there in peace and security, far, far from this land of suspicion and ferocious despotism, of state intrigues and savage punishments, where every second man is the spy upon, and the betrayer of, his fellow."

Britain he might never see more: and now he found himself vaguely speculating on the probable comforts and public amusements afforded by Siberia, and those growing cities of the sorrowing and the banished, Tobolsk and Irkutsk, on the banks of the Lower Angara.

He feared to look much, or often, towards the distant Wood of the Honey Tree, lest watchful eyes might be upon him to gather hints therefrom; still more did he fear to visit Natalie again, lest, by doing so, he might lead to the discovery and arrest of all: so the days and nights of dread, of longing, and suspense, passed slowly after each other now.

The barriers of rank and wealth—the wealth afforded by the Count's estates and mines, his populous villages of serfs, and vast forests of timber—had all been removed now, and Natalie was reduced to a level lower even than her lover's; yet he cursed the mad schemes that had brought about such a revolution, and tossed feverishly and

sleeplessly on his bed, when he thought of Natalie Mierowna,—his own loving and beloved Natalie,—so delicate and so tender, with her white soft skin and silky hair, her earnest and beautiful eyes, lurking among stern and outlawed soldiers in yonder damp cavern of the rocks, upon her bed of leaves and moss, at the mercy, perhaps, of any adherent of Basil's, who, to save his own head, might prove a traitor to them all! This dread was ever before him.

The whole affair reminded him of some of the old Scottish raids or Jacobite plots, of years long passed away; and it was fated to resemble the former more strongly in some of its features, as the dark sequel will show.

The guards and sentinels at Schlusselfurg were doubled; the patrols were incessant by land, while on the lake the gun-boats of Admiral Mackenzie cruised near the walls; the cannons were loaded; the watch-words changed sometimes twice within four-and-twenty hours; and the general state of preparation for a sudden attack was unremitting: but time passed on quietly until the night of the fifteenth of September, when the crowning catastrophe came.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NIGHT OF THE 15TH SEPTEMBER.

THE past day had been unusually gloomy for the season. The sun had set in fiery clouds beyond the spires of St. Petersburg. The night was without a moon, and a strong east wind rolled the waters of Ladoga in billows of inky hue against the massive walls of the fortress in foam and fury on one side, while on the other, the waters of the Neva, swollen by recent rains, gurgled and chafed round the mouldy and moss-grown piers of the drawbridge.

The wind moaned with a sullen sound past the mouths of the cannon, and whistled drearily through the deep embrasures and the loopholes for musketry in the casemates. Thunder had been heard at times, but afar; Elias, as the Russians poetically phrase it, was driving his chariot among the stars. Lightning had reddened all the lake, and cast the weird shadow of the castle athwart it for an instant; and, that a complete and melodramatic omen of impending evil might not be wanting, a huge sea-bird had perched upon the castle clock, and forcing round the hands,

struck midnight four hours before the proper time.

Since morning roll-call, Jagouski, the knouted, beaten, and ill-used Cossack, had been missing; he had quitted the fortress on some trivial pretence and had not since returned; patrols had seen nothing of him. Then Colonel Bernikoff was more than ever on the alert; but Balgonie, who now deemed anything better than the torture of suspense, had gone weary and feverishly to bed, to court for a time the happiness of oblivion, after having spent nearly the entire day upon the lake with an armed boat's crew, patrolling by water.

From sleep, however, a sudden sound aroused him: he looked at his watch, and saw that the hands indicated twelve o'clock, midnight.

What had he heard?

In another moment the sound came again—the drums were beating to arms! He heard the clamour of hoarse Muscovite voices in court and corridor; the clanging of the castle bell; and he saw the gleam of torches reddening the old black walls and towers, and flaring on the grated windows as they were borne to and fro.

His heart was beating with wild anxiety as he threw on his staff uniform, belted his sabre about him, placed his pistols in his girdle, and hurried forth to meet—it might be to cross blades—with the only friends he had in Russia!

As he crossed the castle-yard by torchlight, he

could perceive that the Cossacks, clad in their short blue jackets, red loose breeches, short boots, and tall, black, woollen busbies, were falling into their ranks with musketoon and sabre; and that the gunners were standing by their cannon with port-fires lighted: the latter casting a pale, ghastly, and unearthly glare upon the yawning embrasures, the walls of the fortress, and on their own stolid visages, which were pale and cadaverous as those of people usually who are hastily summoned from sleep in the night.

As a staff officer who had no particular post, Charlie Balgonie knew that his duty attached him chiefly to Bernikoff, whom he now met hurrying forth in uniform, with a great cocked hat thrust angrily over his cunning and twinkling eyes, which were sparkling with anger, while every hair of his grizzled mustachioes, though these were long and snaky, bristled with excitement. There was a dangerous pallor in his visage; his square jaw looked still more tiger-like in contour, as his teeth were clenched; and he had his sabre drawn.

By his side were his two favourite brother officers, who in face, form, and bearing, bore indications of being each, originally, a serf of the lowest, basest, and most unthinking kind—Captain Vlasfief, cruel and hollow-hearted, with his unfathomable smile; and Lieutenant Tschekin, the slimy, savage, and unscrupulous Muscovite. With these came several officers of the Cossack

guard, with their elevated eyebrows, black mustachioes, their keen features, the plumes and cockades in their black fur caps, and their glittering costumes, forming altogether a striking and picturesque group, when seen by the light of several torches, which streamed through the deep and small arch, or doorway, of the keep in which Ivan was confined.

The portcullis of this tower was up; and Balgonie could perceive its row of lower bars, like a line of black fangs in an open jaw, between him and the outline of the lighted archway.

“What is the matter, Colonel Bernikoff,” asked Balgonie; “what is the cause of all this alarm?”

“Matter enough! We have had an *alerte*—the place seems to be invested by troops—Infantry of the Line, by all the devils—the head of a column—look for yourself, Balgonie!” exclaimed Bernikoff, with an oath.

To omit the christian name of a person addressed, and that of his father also, is a direct insult in Russia; but Balgonie heeded it not then. He hurried to the curtain wall which faced the landside, the outer gate, and drawbridge, and then, by the light of a torch, he could see that which certainly seemed to be the head of a column—a front rank of nearly fifty men, clad in the hideous uniform then worn by the Russian army, before it was altered, a few years after, by the superior taste of the notorious Major Semple Lisle, a Scottish

adventurer,* who was well known as a loungeur about St. James's Park, London, in 1804. Their coats were green, lined and faced with red, very tight in the body, with preposterously long skirts, tight breeches, and boots to the knee, with small cocked hats, having long flannel flaps to cover the ears in winter.

By the light of the same torch, Balgonie could see the bayonets fixed, and that two officers, with their sabres drawn, and a drummer, were in front of their little line. Having possession of the parole and countersign, which, no doubt, had been betrayed to them by the absent Jagouski, the whole party had contrived to delude the *Pu'tparaoschick* (sub-lieutenant) in charge of the outer guard, and were now past the first barrier, and had actually taken possession of the drawbridge, which they had lowered across the Neva. The gate and guns of the second barrier were yet to be forced or passed; and thus these midnight visitors were in a species of trap.

Too well could Balgonie recognise in the two officers—Basil Mierowitz, wearing the familiar uniform of the Regiment of Smolensko; and Usakoff, in the gay trappings of the Grenadiers of Valikolutz; and now, for the second time, their drummer beat a *chamade*, or summons for a parley, but as yet there was no response.

Balgonie hastened after Bernikoff and the other

* *Vide* "Life of Major J. G. Semple Lisle, written by himself. London, 1800. Printed for W. Stewart, 194, Piccadilly."

officers. They had now ascended to the chamber of the unfortunate Ivan, from whose presence they had somewhat roughly expelled the chaplain, Father Chrysostom. On entering, he found that the royal recluse had sprung from bed, inspired by natural alarm, on finding his chamber suddenly entered at midnight, and full of armed men; but Ivan manifested no indignation—he was too gentle, too subdued, and completely broken in spirit for that.

His singularly beautiful face was very pale; there was a strange calmness in his manner; and whatever he thought or anticipated, there was more of calm inquiry than of fear in his tone and in the expression of his fine soft eyes. Over his night-dress he had thrown a *robe-de-chambre* of fine scarlet cloth edged with white ermine; and in this attire, with his long hair and delicate features, so chastened in expression by long solitude and complete seclusion from the outer world, he seemed more like a tall handsome woman, than a young man of three and twenty years.

“What is this you tell me, Colonel Bernikoff,” he was asking, as Balgonie entered; “my unhappy life threatened say you?”

“Even so,” said Bernikoff hoarsely, while averting his stealthy eyes from the young man’s open and earnest face; “even so, Ivan Antonovitch; but your death will not be of our seeking.”

“Whose then, whose then?”

"Your friends."

"Oh, what dreadful paradox is this?" asked the Prince calmly; "must I die, even as Demetrius died?"

"Yes," replied the other hoarsely.

"And wherefore?"

"There are those without the gates who seek you, and you must not fall alive into their hands," said Captain Vlasief sternly, as he felt the point of his sabre with a finger.

"Alas! I do not understand who can come to seek me!" replied the poor Prince, shuddering now, while an expression of horror began to spread over his fine face,—a horror gathered from the fierce and relentless aspect he read in the visages of those around him,—and he withdrew a pace or so towards his bed, saying, in a touching voice:—

"Ah, do not leave me, good Colonel Bernikoff, or at least give me a sword—a sword——"

"Fool—child—dolt! thou with a sword, and for what purpose?" thundered Bernikoff, as he sought to lash himself into the requisite pitch of fury; "for what purpose, I say?"

"That I may defend myself."

"'Tis needless," said Tschekin, with a cold smile; "we shall take every care of you."

"Oh, Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, my friend, my good friend! you I can trust—you I can command—come hither, and remain by my side," said the Prince, in an imploring accent, as a

solemn foreboding came upon him when he saw the sabres stealthily drawn from their scabbards on every side, and even the terrible Nicholas Paulovitch drawing near, dagger in hand, with his long lock of hair, his scowling front, and a cruel expression, the very lust of blood, in his deep-set stony eyes. "Carl, Carl," cried Ivan; "your hand!"

"Captain Balgonie—he here!" roared Bernikoff, with one of his terrible maledictions.

"Oh Excellency!" implored Balgonie, scarcely knowing what he should ask or urge.

"Begone, sir, to the barrier gate, and keep the guard there to their duty—begone, sir, I command you, on your allegiance to the Empress!"

To refuse or linger were alike impossible, though a wild cry of entreaty escaped the lips of the young Prince, who sprang forward, but was thrust roughly back towards his couch by many hands and many levelled weapons.

The sword of Damocles, which had hung over his unhappy head so long, was about to descend at last!

Balgonie, his heart swollen almost to bursting with shame, rage, and grief, rushed down the stair of the keep; but at the foot, and just as he passed where the old Chaplain Chrysostom was saying devoutly on his knees the prayers for the *dying*, he heard a shrill and protracted cry of agony ring through the vaulted tower—a cry that made his blood run cold!

Humanity, generosity, and all his own good impulses would have drawn him back to the side, and, if possible, to the aid, of Ivan; but the force of discipline, and a knowledge of his own utter powerlessness, made him pause: for he was but one man—a young officer—a foreigner, too, opposed to a whole garrison of ferocious and unscrupulous soldiers.

When, from the inner barrier gate, he looked up to the window of Ivan's room, he saw that the lights had been extinguished and all was darkness now.

CHAPTER XX.

MORNING OF THE 16TH SEPTEMBER.

WHEN Bernikoff appeared with his group of officers, Charlie Balgonie perceived that there were spots of blood upon his long, white leather gauntlets, that his sabre blade was broken off within six inches of the hilt, and that a terrible expression of ferocity clouded his features and those of all around him, the glare of the uplifted torches now paling as the light of day stole in, adding to the sinister significance of their faces.

At that moment the drummer of the summoners beat a *chamade* for the third time, and Bernikoff, advancing to the klinket, or wicket, in the palisades of the second inner gate, opened it, and, with a great sternness of manner, demanded what they required.

"The release of His Imperial Majesty Ivan IV.," replied Basil Mierowitz, in a firm voice, while courteously saluting Bernikoff, in recognition of his superior rank.

"If I refuse——"

"You do so at your own peril," replied Basil, as sternly and as proudly as if, instead of a few

discontented deserters and enthusiasts, the whole armies of Russia were at his back.

"You cannot be mad enough, Basil Mierowitz, to think of assaulting us?"

"That may or may not be, Excellency, according to circumstances," was the reply.

"What troops are these under your orders?"

"A guard of honour for the Emperor, if you peacefully comply—the first portion of an investing force, if you refuse," replied Mierowitz; but a sinister gleam of triumph flashed in the malicious eyes of Bernikoff, who gathered more of his real weakness from this evasive reply, than the rash young noble intended.

"Listen, Colonel Bernikoff," he continued, while drawing from his breast a long paper of official aspect, to which several green and scarlet seals were attached: "Her Majesty Catharine II. —for a time of all the Russias—having come to the conclusion of resigning the imperial crown (convinced at last that she has no claim thereto), and of replacing it on the head of the Emperor Ivan (son of Anthony Ulric, Duke of Wolfenbuttel), whom she now feels herself compelled to acknowledge as her lawful sovereign, though basely deposed in infancy by her predecessors, the Empress Elizabeth, and the Emperor Peter III.; therefore she hereby commands you, Colonel Bernikoff, Governor of her Castle of Schlusselfburg, to set the Prince at liberty, with all speed and honour."

For a document and summons of this artful and remarkable nature, Bernikoff was altogether unprepared. For a moment he grew deadly pale, but for a moment only, and glanced at the startled faces of those around him. Had he been too precipitate in bloodshed?

"Where is Her Majesty just now?" he asked.

"In the palace of the Czars, at Novgorod."

"Was Novgorod so empty of all the great nobles and officers of Russia, that a document of such a nature was entrusted to a mere Lieutenant of Infantry—a deserter from Livonia?" said Bernikoff, with sudden rage. "'Tis an imposture—a forgery; there is but one God in Heaven—one monarch on earth, the Empress Catharine; and you, Mierowitz, and all who league with you, are but base dogs and traitors!"

"Forward!" cried Basil, brandishing his sabre; "storm the gate—bayonet all who oppose us!"

"Long live Ivan Antonovitch—long live the Emperor!" exclaimed his soldiers, rushing forward. But the klinket in the palisades was at once closed, and secured against them by an enormous transverse beam of wood; and though a confused volley of musketry was exchanged between them and the main guard, no one was struck, save Bernikoff, who staggered back into the arms of Vlasief, having been bayoneted in the breast by the deserter Jagouski, who drove his weapon between the palisades, nearly finishing what Basil had begun by the blow of a musket but, which

crushed the Colonel's hat, and nearly fractured his skull.

"Ah! dogs and Asiatics, you have struck me!" shouted Bernikoff, whose voice was hoarse with rage and pain. "Dost know the penalty of wounding an officer—of striking a soldier who wears a decoration?"

"Accursed Tartar, I neither know nor care. I revenge my brother's death at Zorndorf, my own wrongs, and the murder of Peter III.!" replied the exulting Cossack, with a bitter laugh.

"May my right hand wither, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, when most I need them both, if I have not a terrible vengeance for all this work!" cried Bernikoff. "Vlasief, Tschekin, show them their Prince!"

While the undaunted Basil and his friend Usakoff, with their soldiers, proceeded to wheel round a cannon of the outworks, a 32-pounder, for the purpose of blowing open the klinket of the inner barrier; and while Balgonie, a silent but excited and sick-hearted spectator of the whole affair, lingered close by, heedless whether the round-shot and grape, with which they were charging the gun, came his way, or not,—a window in the first story of the keep was dashed open, and while every torch and every eye were uplifted to the place, a terrible spectacle, which hushed all into momentary silence, was exhibited.

It was the dead body of the young and hand-

some Ivan, suspended by the neck, at the end of a rope, stripped even of his night-dress, cold and white as the marble of Paros, and gashed with ten gaping wounds; for, as we are told in the newspapers of the period, "the unfortunate prince had struggled some time for his life, and even broke the Governor's sword in the conflict; but assistance was called for, and another bloody assassin (Vlasfief) appeared, who finished the horrid work."

An exclamation of dismay and grief escaped Balgonie, on beholding this appalling spectacle; the weird and ghastly horror of which was enhanced by the uncertain light in which it was exhibited, and which imparted a wavering and almost life-like action to the corpse, as with its long hair floating, head and arms pendent, it swayed to and fro in the morning wind against the castle wall.

"*Hospodi pomilui! Hospodi pomilui!*"* cried Basil Mierowitz, covering his face with his hands, and permitting the musket with which he had armed himself to fall to the ground with a clash, which, together with his most mournful exclamation, alone broke the silence.

"Behold," said Bernikoff, in cruel triumph, while blasphemously using the words of Ezekiel—"behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke!" Glory to God and to the

* Lord have mercy upon us!

Empress! This is your Emperor—now let him head your troops. Doubtless he will make a fine figure on the Imperial throne.”

“Oh! Bernikoff,” exclaimed Basil, “you are like Judas, as we may see him at the Kazan church—one hand on the mouth denoting treachery, and the other on a bag of money.”

“Thou liest, Lieutenant! my fingers know more of the grip of steel than of gold,” said the other furiously, as he hurled the hilt of his broken sabre at the speaker.

“So—so—this has been your work and decision?”

“Yes—how do you like it?” was the mocking reply.

“Thou art a cruel judge; but remember the law of Peter the Great——”

“Which makes the judge answerable for his decision?”

“Yes.”

“Then shall I content me, traitor, and be answerable for my decision as well as for its execution. I have done my duty to the Czarina.”

“You have done a deed for which hell must blush and angels weep,” was the forcible reply of Mierowitz, who seemed so overcome by grief and horror as to lose all self-possession; for he now ordered his men to disperse to the woods—to seek safety in flight; and then calmly taking off his sword-belt and sash, he threw them on the ground saying—

“Since my Imperial master is dead, further resistance would be vain in me.”

He was almost immediately afterwards struck to the earth, and made prisoner by Lieutenant Tschekin, who, with a party of dismounted Cossacks, had stolen through the casemates and galleries to a postern opening on the rear of the drawbridge, and these, after firing a confused volley with their pistols and muskets, fell with their sharp crooked sabres upon the now thoroughly disheartened adherents of Mierowitz. Lieutenant Usakoff and Jagouski alone made any vigorous resistance, resolving not to be taken alive.

Fighting desperately, almost back to back, the former armed with the sabre of Mazeppa, and the latter with a musket, and both bleeding from many wounds, they were driven through the outer barrier towards the town. On the pathway Jagouski stumbled over a comrade, and was taken; but Apollo Usakoff, with a shout in which triumph and despair were mingled, leaped into the Neva, the waters of which swept him away, and he was seen no more by his pursuers.

When Tschekin's Cossacks joined in the *mêlée* with the fugitives, Balgonie sprang through the klinket, sword in hand, resolved to succour his friend at all hazards, and fortunately arrived just in time to save him (when struck down and trod under foot) from the bulky giant Nicholas Paulovitch, who, with a clubbed musket, was about to

give him a blow that must inevitably have proved fatal.

Paulovitch he ran through the heart—or at least the place where his heart might be supposed to have been—and spurning him off the blade with his foot, hurled the snorting ruffian to the ground, and raised his friend, with the assistance of a soldier and Lieutenant Tschekin.

“Made prisoner, and by *you* too, Carl!” said Basil, reproachfully and in a low voice, for he was faint with wounds and bruises.

“By me, but to save you.”

“Seek rather to save Natalie, if you can,” he whispered; “she is, she is—”

“Where, *where*?” said Balgonie, impetuously and imploringly.

But there was no reply. Basil had fainted, and was borne into the Castle of Schlusselfburg, a prisoner of State.

Balgonie never saw the face of his friend again!

So ended, for a time, a scheme, the importance of which was only equalled by its bold recklessness—the scheme of two subaltern officers to revolutionise the vast empire of Russia, and to subvert the firm dominion of Catharine II., one of the most powerful and popular, though licentious, monarchs that ever sat on the barbarous throne of the Czars; and such was the terrible sequel to the *Secret Dispatch* of Balgonie.

Day had completely broken when he was sum-

moned by Bernikoff. Shuddering as he passed through the court of the Castle and under the very window where the corpse was yet swaying mournfully to and fro in the morning breeze that swept from the broad waters of the vast lake, whose ripples were shining like gold in the first beams of the autumnal sun, Charlie sought the presence of this detestable personage, the thunder of whose wrath he feared was about to descend upon himself.

He found the Colonel in his shirt sleeves, and almost covered with blood, which was flowing from a wound in his breast and another on the head, from whence it was trickling to the ends of his long and snaky grey mustaches. To both of these cuts the barber was about to apply dressings, while the patient solaced himself by scheming out some dreadful punishment for Jagouski, who, with several others, had fallen into his gentle hands, and by uttering deep oaths, and imbibing deep draughts from a great wooden bowl of quass, dashed with fiery vodka.

Balgonie, whose thoughts ran chiefly upon how to discover and succour Natalie, was roused to attention by Bernikoff saying grimly—

“Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, for aiding in the capture of the rebel Mierowitz, I thank you; suspicions I had, but they are gone. You are now, perhaps, to rejoin the Regiment of Smolensko, and shall bear a dispatch from me to Lieutenant-General Weymarn and Lieutenant-Colonel Casch-

kin (who are both in St. Petersburg), relating the affair of the last twelve hours. Vlasfief shall prepare it, and I will sign it. Place a feather in the seal, lest the Captain lingers as he did at Louga ! Here, Carl Ivanovitch, taste the quass ; 'tis the *trisna* of Ivan the Unknown Person !”

There was something so horrible in this levity and impiety to the Cossacks, that even they exchanged uneasy glances, for the *trisna* at funeral feasts is a mixture of rum, beer, and wine, and is an ancient Sclavonian beverage. When it is handed round, all stand up uncovered, the clergy recite a solemn prayer, and at its close the *trisna* is drunk to the health of the departed Christian soul ; so Balgonie shuddered, as he thought of the gashed and dishonoured corpse that swung by the neck without the castle wall.

This emotion did not escape the fierce eyes of Bernikoff, though his wounds were most severe, and his mind was wandering.

“Nay, look not at me thus, Scot,” said the genuine old Russian fatalist ; “God willed it that Prince Ivan should be put in my charge ; and the devil, together with my duty to the Empress, inspired me to destroy him. What is done, is done, and is the will of God ; and you know, or ought to know, our Muscovite proverb—the Czar is high, and God is everywhere !”

“Three times has this old reprobate mentioned that terrible Name, and each time bowing his sinful head !” thought Charlie, with disgust and wonder.

“Hah!” resumed Bernikoff, pursuing his own thoughts, and clenching his teeth in rage and pain, “did that suckling of a Lieutenant think to deceive me—I, who have been forty years in the Russian army, and have to deal with the most cunning scoundrels between the Black Sea and the Baltic! Jagouski, too, I’ll fill his mouth with gunpowder, put a fuse between his teeth, and blow his head off. By St. Sergius, I will! But, holy Saint, alleviate these pangs, by ever so little, and this night six pounds of the finest white wax shall burn before thee.” He gnashed his teeth with pain, and added, “Be ready to ride in an hour, Captain; till then, leave me.”

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDERGROUND.

THE Empress's court of Secret Chancery soon decided on the fate of Basil Mierowitz; the Count, his father, and his cousin Mariolizza, who had been passive, though suspected in the matter, had their cases taken into future consideration, so they were kept close prisoners while their properties and possessions were given up to pillage and military execution. Basil was condemned to be broken alive upon the wheel; but the Empress, who had a particular tenderness for handsome men, "mitigated his punishment to the less severe one of being beheaded."

A brief paragraph in the *London Gazette* of the 23rd October records this brave fellow's death, just fourteen days after his rash affair at Schlus-selburg :

"M. Mierowitz, in pursuance of his sentence, was publicly beheaded on Wednesday last; he behaved at his execution, as he had done throughout the whole transaction, with the greatest resignation. Six of the soldiers and under-officers who were engaged with him ran the gantelope the same day; they were so severely whipped

that it is said three of them are since dead. Many more are to be punished. One, Usakoff, a Lieutenant in the Regiment of Welikolutz (*sic*) who was privy to the design, was accidentally drowned."

Notwithstanding his rank and years, old Count Mierowitz was retained in a dungeon among a number of miserable Russian rogues and Polish prisoners, clad in filthy sheepskin shoubahs, many of them being afflicted with the terrible disease known as *plica polonica*, or matted hair, which hung over their necks in clotted lumps, every tube being swollen and dilated with globules of blood.

The lower vaults of Schlusselfurg were those built by Ivan the Terrible, for the reception of a few of the revolvers of Novgorod, after he had put twenty-five thousand of her citizens to the sword. They were such prisons as—let us hope—are no longer in use, even in Russia, although the London press has asserted that, until lately, exactly such *oubliettes* or dungeons were in active operation, and never without tenants, under the royal rule of the deposed Francis II., and prior to the remodelling of Italy by Victor Emmanuel.

They were like the frightful cells of the Bastille, which Victor Hugo has described in "Notre Dame;" those of the Inquisition at Goa or Madrid, or of old castles of the middle ages; but apart from the happily departed horrors of such places, even English jails have been little better than

living graves within the memory of many now alive ; for one of the greatest glories of modern civilisation, in all countries, has been the amelioration of prisons and their government, and the substitution of mercy and protection in their general economy for that irresponsible despotism and wanton cruelty which have formed such ample materials for the romancer and novelist to excite compassion and even dismay.

Yet it is exactly such a place—a prison of the middle ages—a rival to that Chillon to which Byron's genius has given a greater name than ever its terrors won it—we are now about to describe : one of the lower vaults of Schlusselburg, a den, the floor of which was below the rocks whereon the seals of Ladoga basked in the sunshine, and which was consequently liable to be flooded during those inundations that at certain seasons, overflow all the country for a great way north, so that no crops will grow save upon the eminences.

Vaulted with stone, it was nearly square, and measured twelve feet each way, with a floor that sloped down at one end, having been unevenly hewn out when the rock was pierced ; and from a portion of this rock sprang the solid arch of granite blocks which formed the roof. A narrow slit, six inches broad by twelve high, and having even in that small space a thick iron bar, admitted to the interior a feeble ray of light. This slit was partly built of stone, but its sill was

the living rock of Schlusselfburg. It opened towards the lake, but gave no prospect save the clouds, for it was high up in the wall; yet the melancholy cries of the waterfowl and of the seabirds, which often came up the Neva from the Baltic, were heard through it at times.

The prisoner, when seated on the stone bench which formed a bed or seat alternately, could only see the changing hues of the sky and patches of cloud, and know by the darkness which gradually obscured this mere shot-hole that day was passing away, and that another night, chill, dark, dreary, and hopeless, was at hand.

As the floor sloped down some twelve inches or more, the lower end was always full of water, into which the slime that gathered on the vault of the arch fell at intervals with a regular plash that, to the silent and apparently forgotten prisoner, became maddening in its monotony of sound, by day and night, by morning and evening, by dawn and sunset. Then, as the tides rose and fell, or as the waters of the vast inland lake of Ladoga are affected by the Baltic stopping the downward flow of the Neva, or by rains flooding the many tributaries that join them, so did this dark pool in the dungeon rise and fall, when the current oozed through secret and unknown channels or crannies in the granite rocks.

It was in this vault, or one of those adjoining—such a den as that in which Dante placed his

Demon—that the betrayed wife of Count Orloff, the beautiful daughter of the Empress Elizabeth, was drowned, ten years after the date of this history, when the waters of the Neva rose ten feet ; and, as they subsided, bore her body to the Gulf of Finland.

No one could live very long in such a place—low, damp, cold, and horrible. And well did Bernikoff know this, when, in the blind transports of rage and agony resulting from his double wounds, he barbarously consigned Natalie Mierowna to such a place—ay, even Natalie, the soft and delicate, the highly-bred and tenderly-nurtured daughter of Count Mierowitz ; and she had now been in the underground vault for three days and nights,—seventy-two hours,—which to her had resembled a horrible and protracted nightmare.

She was ignorant as yet of her brother's execution, a week before. Betrayed by one of their most trusted adherents as the price of his own liberty, she and Katirka had been taken. Of the fate of the latter she knew nothing : a mere Polish waiting-maid, a pretty soubrette, she had too probably become the lawful prey of the Cossacks, whom Natalie had last seen in the forest, with terrible significance rattling their dice on a kettle-drum head.

For herself, the poor girl only knew that she was placed there to await the pleasure of the Empress and the Grand Chancellor.

Hope was dead completely in her heart ; and though the desire to live was strong, her former life seemed all a dream, or something that had happened long, long ago !

Crouching on a damp pallet that lay on the couch of stone, her hair dishevelled, her dress more than ever torn, discoloured, and disordered, her snowy arms and hands stripped of every ornament and ring, her tender feet well-nigh shoeless, her eyes half closed and surrounded by dark inflamed circles, her cheeks sunk and haggard,—it would be difficult to recognise in her the once beautiful and brilliant Natalie, whose coquetry had excited the ready jealousy of Catharine in that fatal Mazurka ; the Natalie of the imperial *salons* at Moscow, at Oranienbaum, or the palace of Tsarsky Selo ; or the Natalie of that princely old château near the Louga—the proud, bright-eyed, and beautiful girl whom Charlie Balgonie had loved, and worshipped as a goddess.

As she crouched in a species of stupor beside a wooden bowl of stale water and a mouldy loaf of black bread, there seemed to be no breath in her tender nostrils, no sound in those little ears over which the black hair rolled in unheeded masses—no sound save the monotonous splash of the dropping slime. She was pale as white marble,—cold as death,—a prey to utter confusion rather than profound grief. There were times when she felt and thought and knew of nothing : but there were others when all the past—the memory

of her ruined house, her shattered love, her slaughtered friends, their fatal project, and her lost position in society—brought a cruel and keen pang to her heart, and made her writhe and start and wring her hands, but not weep; for she had not a tear left; and her hard dry eyeballs were the only warm part of her shuddering frame.

Seventy-two hours had she been there, yet the time seemed so long already, that she knew not whether it were seventy-two days or the same number of weeks.

When she did rouse herself to steady reflection and the realities of her position, thought well-nigh drove her mad.

Her old father—his sturdy figure, his venerable beard and white eyebrows, his silver hair queued by a simple ribbon, his quaint old-fashioned costume of the first Peter's time, rose vividly before her; and with a gush of memory came all his peculiarities of disposition, his warmth of heart and temper, his kindness and irritability, his pride of race and family. Where were all these now?

Her lover too—his voice, and eyes, and gentle manner came next, to add to her pangs; for him too must she relinquish for ever: no shelter was there now for her save the cold grave, which was perhaps to receive them all! Basil, Usakoff, and Mariolizza—alas! terrible though her own sufferings, she little knew those to which the fairer beauty and more unwary tongue of Mariolizza had subjected that unhappy girl.

The excellent taste, the polished education, and high accomplishments of Natalie, which were so far superior to those of most ladies of her own rank and country then, gave a greater poignancy to the horrors of reality and imagination; yet imagination could supply no horror but what was real and sternly so.

Their princely old dwelling amid the pine forests—never more would she see its dome of polished copper shining in the sun, or the wooded domain that stretched for uncounted versts around it; or her father's patrimonial village, nestling by the Louga, which bore his rafts of timber to the sea, and by night reflected the glare of those furnaces which were another source of his vast wealth, and the means of procuring a thousand luxuries.

Better would it have been, had she and they and all succumbed to Catharine's iron rule, than sought the freedom of Ivan IV.; but it was too late—too late, now!

Was it all a dream from which she must awaken? Strange it was, that as weariness, sleep, or a stupor stole over her, scraps of songs, frivolous ones especially, airs from operas, and so forth, occurred to her drowsy ear, as if her brain was turning; and to these the filtering plash and the sound of the rising waves and wind without seemed to mark a cadence.

Suddenly a scream escaped her: she was in total darkness. Amid her sleep or stupor, a fourth night had come on—a night of storm too; for she

heard the roar of the autumn rain, as it descended like a vast sheet upon the lake without.

Cold and slimy things had often crossed her slender ankles, making her shrink and shudder: but now she became sensible that her feet were completely immersed in water; that the wind was bellowing without and rolling the waves against the rocks; and that the current of the lake was flooding the floor of her vault, and rising fast within it.

It rose with appalling rapidity: and now the terror of a dreadful death made Natalie utter a succession of piercing shrieks, mingled with prayers to heaven. But her cries were unheard; for the same cold, icy tide that flooded her cell, filled all the corridors by which it and others on the same floor were approached.

Rapidly it rose, this dark, silent, and terrible tide—rapidly and without a sound.

She sprang upon her stone couch, but already the pallet was floated away. Up yet rose the invading water, and it was soon nearly to her waist; and gasping and shuddering cries were mingled with her prayers. A little more, and the narrow slit through which she could hear the bellowing wind and see the black clouds careering past one red and fiery northern star—the last gleam of life and of the outer world—would vanish from her eyes, as she perished in that miserable tomb; even as the Princess Orloff and many others have done, helpless and unheeded in their dying agony

—drowned miserably, like the prison rats that swam around them.

In the last energies of her despair, she made her way to the enormously thick door which closed this trap of stone, and, applying her lips to the joints, shrieked loudly again and again for succour, and beat wildly and fruitlessly with her tender hands upon its massive planks and iron bolts.

Her brain seemed bursting, for she was suffocating as the air lessened. She thought she saw a red light shining through the crannies of the doorway; but whether this were fancy or reality, it was impossible to say, as a faintness came over her, and she sank down choking and drowning in the dark flood that rose within the walls and against the door of the prison.

CHAPTER XXII.

OVER THEIR WINE.

HEAVY and sad was the heart of Charlie Balgonie when, on the evening of the 16th September, that which was subsequent to the episode at Schlusselfburg, he saw the domes and towers of St. Petersburg glittering in gold and bronze, in green and fiery or fantastic colours, amid the rich glow of a ruddy sunset; and where rising from the haze of the vast city, the polished cupola of St. Isaac's Cathedral, and the slender spire of the Admiralty, like a needle of flame, seemed to float in mid air.

As he entered the first guarded barrier, he met a party of Lancers riding at a trot, their tall fur caps having scarlet kalpecs and large plumes, their lances, each with a long bannerole of the same colour, waving in the wind. They escorted a covered kabitka, or waggon, and were led by the Count de Balmain, a Scottish officer, who, in after years, stormed Kaffa, in the Crimea.

"Whither go you, Count?" he asked.

"For Schlusselfburg—the place of sorrow."

"With a prisoner, of course?"

"Yes, I regret to say, with the niece of Count

Mierowitz, with Mademoiselle Mariolizza. She is to be confined under a warrant from the Grand Chancellor—poor girl!”

Sadder and heavier grew the honest heart of Balgonie, as the escort and its hearse-like carriage passed on; and, as he looked after it, the fair merry face, the full and voluptuous figure, the gay manner, and remarkable *finesse d'esprit* of the betrothed of poor Basil, as he had last seen her at Louga, came back vividly to memory now.

Balgonie was at St. Petersburg when Mierowitz was executed, and when other horrors followed. Moreover, he was closely and repeatedly interrogated by the Grand Chancellor, the Privy Councillor, Count Panim, by Count Orloff (the present lover of the Empress), and by General Weymarn, as to all he knew and had seen of the conspirators—so closely, that nothing surprised him so much as to find that no suspicion was attached to himself. But being a soldier of fortune, who possessed nothing in the world but his sword and his epaulettes, he was not worth suspecting by the Imperial Government.

Ere long, the name of Natalie came before the Secret Chancery, as a prisoner in Schlusselfburg; and, like the rest, she was tried and condemned in absence, undefended and unheard; and sentenced, too, amid the solitude of her prison.

To Balgonie the charm of life seemed to have passed away; and, during the week or two that followed his return to St. Petersburg, dreary,

weary, and unmeaning, indeed, seemed the routine of his duties as aide-de-camp at the vast parades, the brilliant receptions, the courts-martial, and other public affairs to which he followed his *chef*, General Weymarn, at the palaces of Tsarsky Selo or Oranienbaum, and elsewhere, while ignorant of the fate of Natalie—while the very life of her he loved hung in the balance.

When compared with their fate, how happy seemed those lovers, who, though separated for a period, could look confidently forward through the long succession of hours, of days and nights, of weeks, and months, or even years, and reckon with certainty on the time of reunion! With him and Natalie, time stretched into a length that seemed interminable: their future had no background; their separation was one without hope.

Charlie, in his desperation, applied to the Marquis de Bausset and to Sir George Macartney, then the Ambassadors from France and Britain; and both received his verbal prayers—he dared not write on such a subject—for mercy to the Count's family: but they were unheeded; and the Ministers replied only by bows, grimaces, and shrugs of their diplomatic shoulders. Their interference was impossible—quite; and, unfortunately, his old patron, Admiral Thomas Mackenzie, was with the fleet in the Black Sea.

The suspicions excited against his Regiment and the Grenadiers of Valikolutz, might procure the banishment of both; he feared it in the form

of service in Siberia, or at the Crimean lines of Perecop. In either case, unless Weymarn stood his friend, how could he hope to succour Natalie!

At every tea-house, hotel, and café, his uniform of the Smolensko Infantry, and the knowledge that he was the staff officer who had been in Schlusselfurg, and who brought the first tidings of the late affair, made him an object of special interest; but the subject was alike a perilous and painful one. Walls have many ears in Russia; so he was compelled to be silent, or discreet, even to rudeness, though the following declaration, which was issued by the Empress, might have allayed his fears:—

“We, Catharine the Second, by the Grace of God, Empress and Sovereign of all the Russias, &c., &c., make known to our Regiment of Smolensko Infantry that, according to the equity which we exert towards our faithful subjects, we cannot represent to ourselves, without profound grief, how much that regiment must be afflicted, for having among its officers a wretch in the person of Mierowitz: nevertheless, as the crime of one man cannot affect those who had no part in it, and that, besides, we know the bravery with which the regiment has distinguished itself upon all occasions, its attachment to strict discipline, and its exactness in the military duty of our empire; therefore we grant it, through our imperial good-will, the same assurances of protection which

it has in all times deserved. . In consequence, we forbid all and every one, to reproach or upbraid the said regiment concerning the treason of Mierowitz, under pain of incurring our indignation, and drawing on themselves the effects of our just resentment.

(Signed)

“CATHARINE.”

Hope seemed to revive a little after the issue of this conciliatory *oukas*; but it was speedily dashed, when Balgonie, on returning from Cronstadt, whither he had been sent by General Weymarn, suddenly met Captain Vlasfief face to face, near the palace of the favourite Lanskoï.

This personage he would have avoided like a toad or a leper; but from him only might he learn something of her he loved in Schlusselfburg, that hateful place to which the Captain was returning; so, overcoming, or rather concealing, his repugnance, he adjourned with him to a café, and ordered wine.

“I dare say you have heard,” said Vlasfief, with a strange leer in his eyes, as he tossed his hat and sabre on one sofa and deposited his jack-booted limbs on another, “how the estates of the Count and those of Usakoff have been sold or gifted away; pillaged and ravaged by Lanskoï with a party of Tchernemoski Cossacks; and that the plunder has been stored up in Schlusselfburg?”

“Something of all this I have heard,” replied

Balgonie, when the waiter had filled their glasses and withdrawn, "and—and—but you have there two ladies of the Count's family?"

"True—Mademoiselle Mariolizza, who was engaged to Mierowitz, and the Count's daughter : one beautifully fair, the other black-haired like a Pole. Poor girls!" he continued, while leisurely filling the large china bowl of a tasselled pipe, which suspiciously resembled one Charlie had often seen the old Count smoking, "I remember them both in happier and brighter times; but those who play with fire will, you know, be burned. The sentences on all have been found, recorded, and, in two instances, executed; and they are truly terrible!"

"Executed—the sentence!" repeated Balgonie, in a faint voice.

"Yes; you have been four days at Cronstadt : well, in those four days many things have been done—a light; thank you. The Count is now travelling towards Tobolsk under an escort of Balmain's Lancers. There he will have to hunt the ermine, cultivate asafœtida, or dig in the mines, with a collar at his neck, for the remainder of his days; but for the ladies of his family, a more severe punishment was reserved : ah ! he is a stern fellow, old Panim !"

"How—what? Vlasfief, you jest?"

"'Tis no jest : we don't jest on such matters in Russia," replied Vlasfief, who was too thorough a *roué*—too "used up," in fact—to care for what

any woman might suffer or undergo ; for every human emotion and sympathy were dead in this man now.

“ What new horrors am I to hear ? ” exclaimed Balgonie, with passionate vehemence, as he dashed his heavy Turkish sabre on the table.

Vlasfief smiled sourly, and his cunning eyes twinkled.

“ You are a Scot, like Balmain,” said he disdainfully ; “ and as the Turks—those accursed unbelievers—say, but truly, ‘ Those who have never seen the world think it is all like their father’s house.’ Pass the bottle—’tis Cracow wine this, and not worth four ducats the flask. In short, the—the two ladies of the Count’s family, in the wildness of their grief,—Mariolizza especially,—on hearing of the death of Mierowitz, permitted their tongues to run riot, and to say such things of Her Imperial Majesty and some of her favourites, such as Count Orloff, Lanskoi, the Grenadier, and so forth, as no woman would pardon, you understand ; so they are to be given in succession to *le maitre d’entre les épaules*—the master of the shoulders,” added Vlasfief, with a species of laugh at the strange expression which he saw gathering in Balgonie’s face.

“ Explain, I implore you, explain ! ” asked the latter, with quivering lips, as he set down a crystal goblet of Hungarian wine untasted on the table.

“ Mademoiselle Mariolizza—but you don’t

drink fairly, Ivanovitch—has received six blows of the knout. The torturer is a new man, and mangled her cruelly. She has had her tongue cut out, and her forehead branded with the executioner's mark;* and she goes to Siberia as soon as she recovers: but she will never reach it alive, even if she escapes the fever that has now seized her; for as the whole family has been degraded,—declared infamous and without protection,—being tongueless, she will become the prey of the Cossacks *en route*. Once beyond the Volga, we never know what happens. The Count's daughter will undergo exactly similar punishment; and, if she survives it, they will be mercifully permitted to travel together: and there ends the House of Mierowitz, which boasts of its descent from Ruric of Kiev—Ruric the Varagian of Old Ladoga!"

With wonderful coolness of manner, over his wine and pipe, almost with an occasional jest, the cruel and snakelike Vlasfief—who, as a *parvenu* of the foundling hospital (the son of a goat), hated the hereditary aristocracy—detailed these matters; and Balgonie felt as if a black cloud enveloped him. He heard the Captain talking; but his mind and thoughts were far, far away; and, after a time, he found himself alone.

Vlasfief had mounted and ridden off; and mechanically, like an automaton, Balgonie had bidden him adieu at the portico of the café, and returned to finish his wine, as one in a waking

* The latter punishment is abolished *now*.

dream: nor was it until the bell of St. Isaac's tolled midnight, when the lights were burned low, the fire in the peitchka had died away, the decanters were empty, and he saw a drowsy waiter hovering near him, that he rose to depart; for to him, now, all places seemed alike.

In the street a shower of tears revived him; and he wept unseen, like a great boy, while grinding his teeth and twisting his mustaches like a furious and desperate man. Russia, her laws, her rulers, her very air, he loathed and detested. But what was he to do?—which way was he to turn?—was he to permit these horrors, and live?

He had been present when the Regiment of Smolensko guarded the punishment of Madame Lapouchin, one of the most beautiful women of the Imperial Court, where she shone like a planet, was loved, admired, and more than once was fought for. An alleged conspiracy brought her to the knout in all her nude loveliness, in the light of open day; and Charlie remembered that sickening scene, before the eyes of assembled thousands, and how, as the Abbé d'Anterroche records, "in a few moments all the skin of her tender back was cut away in small slips, most of which remained hanging on her shift. Her tongue was cut out immediately after; and she was banished into Siberia."

"Oh Natalie, Natalie!" he could but repeat, while he wrung his hands; and thus the dawn of day found him.

After mature consideration of his position, his powerlessness, and the difficulties that beset him, with the horrors impending over Natalie, poor Charlie Balgonie felt maddened, crushed, and heart-broken. Could he see her perish without a struggle, an effort, however reckless, fruitless, and futile, on her behalf, even if he pistoled the executioner? Could he know that she too, probably, would die, in agony and mutilation, a horrible and ignominious death,—she, so gentle, delicate, and pure,—and would he survive it?

“Hearts will break in this life,” says a recent writer; “it is the nature of them; but if God wills it, and it were possible, it is honestest, braver, and nobler to live than to die.” Most true; but to live is to hope. Balgonie vaguely, but sternly, resolved that he would do something, or—like the hero of a melodrama—“die in the attempt;” but being a poor, bewildered, loving young fellow, he could in no way practically see what that something might be.

Let not the reader flatter himself or herself that their own beloved country was entirely free from legal barbarism at this time; for in the very year of Ivan’s murder,—the fourth year of the reign of His Majesty George III.,—a woman was *burned* at the stake in Ilchester for poisoning her husband. During the reign of his son, more than one head was chopped off for treason; and women were flogged by tap of drum, for petty theft, at the Market Cross of Edinburgh. Neither

need the superstitions of the poor Muscovitee excite surprise, when we find, in 1867, Highlanders in Scotland putting clay figures into running streams to bring consumption and wasting upon their enemies; burying a living cock (as the Pagan sacrificed to Hermes) to cure epilepsy; and a woman in Somersetshire* cooking toads in a pan, exactly as the "black and midnight hags" did in the days of Macbeth, for the amiable purpose of bewitching her neighbours. So truly does the world reproduce itself, in spite of its boasted civilisation.

The next day was not far advanced when Balgonie was summoned by General Weymarn, whose staff he had been resolving to quit; but for what purpose, or whither to go, he knew not. With something of a shudder, he beheld the Stepniak—the comrade and confederate of the late Nicholas Paulovitch—leaving the General's quarters.

Save that he wore the scarlet livery of his new trade,—torture and death,—he was unchanged, and was the same hideous and ill-visaged giant—with square shoulders, enormous beard, mouse-like eyes, hair shorn off straight across the beetle brows, and the pine-apple shaped head—whom Balgonie had seen in the hut where the wretched Podatchkine perished. He was now public executioner of St. Petersburg: under his felon hands had poor Mierowitz and Mariolizza been, and ere long would Natalie be!

* *Western Gazette*, September, 1867.

Weymarn was a grave and stern, yet not unkind, old soldier; and, on perceiving that his young aide-de-camp looked pale, he spoke to him with unusual kindness, and added :—

“I am sorry to say, that I have a new duty of importance for you to perform.”

“Thanks, General; any excitement is better than—than idleness.”

“True. You will have to ride to Schlussemburg with an escort, composed of six Cossacks of the Imperial Guard, and bring hither in a kabitka the sum of eighty thousand roubles, which are there in canvas bags, *sealed*. They have been levied on the estates of the Count Mierowitz. You will receive them from the officer commanding there: give a signed receipt, and deliver them into the Imperial Treasury.”

Balgonie bowed in silence.

The General, who, of course, knew well the corrupt venality of the Russian service, added :—

“If the sum is brought *entire* to the Treasury, Carl Ivanovitch, a reasonable gratuity will, of course, be paid you.”

“Excellency, I require none for doing my duty, either in this or any other matter,” replied Balgonie coldly, even haughtily.

“As you please, sir,—as you please. Some among us might be less particular,” said the old General, tugging his grisly mustaches. “And stay; by-the-bye, there is a prisoner in Schlussemburg, whose sentence is to be executed to-morrow,

in presence of the assembled troops and people here——”

Balgonie thought of but *one* prisoner there; and an icy chill came over him, as Weymarn said—

“With the escort and the kabitka, Captain, you will, at the same time, bring the culprit here.”

“And—and this pris—on—oner, Excellency?” faltered the poor fellow.

“Is Jagouski, the Cossack, who so severely wounded Colonel Bernikoff when in the execution of his duty.”

Charlie breathed more freely.

“An order will be necessary for you—a special order: since the affair of that wretched young fellow Mierowitz, we cannot be too particular, so take this:—

“*To the officer commanding in Schlusselfburg.*

“‘You are hereby directed to deliver to Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, of the Smolensko Regiment, the prisoner who is to be executed to-morrow.

“‘WEYMARN, *Lieutenant-General.*’

“For the delivery of the money, here is a separate order from the Treasurer—adieu.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILL HE SUCCEED?

As Balgonie left the presence of General Weymarn, a sudden light broke through the darkness of his mind—an unlooked-for thought and hope suddenly inspired him, and a prayer of thanks to Heaven rose to his lips therefore. No prisoner was actually designated by *name* in the written order of the General!

Thus, in lieu of the Cossack Jagouski, he would demand that Natalie Mierowna be given into his custody; and with her he would escape, quit Russia and the service of the Empress at all risks.

He had no papers—no leave of absence, or passport; but, as the epaulette is an all-powerful badge in Russia, his uniform and his sabre would be passports enough. For the rest, he must trust to his own love and courage, and to his knowledge of the country. But then there was the Cossack escort—how was he to rid himself of it? The same kind Heaven which favoured and inspired him now, would not fail to do so, he hoped, when the crisis came.

While his best horse was being saddled and

accounted, and even when the escort was at the door, he consulted, till the last moment, the map of Russia, and also that of Finland, which was not ceded to the latter till forty-four years after ; and he made notes of his proposed route. Escape by sea, by the Lake of Ladoga, or by the shores of the Gulf, were alike impossible.

There was no way for it but to ride, at all hazards, towards the frontier of Finland, or the shores of the Lake of Saima ; they would there be safe beyond pursuit—safe among the hospitable Swedes, who are always hostile to the grasping and aggressive Russians. And so for nearly an hour he sat, compass in hand, calculating the chances and measuring the distances, while his brain grew giddy, and his heart was sick, with mingled hope, anxiety, and a love that was full of terror and compassion.

At last he saw his way clearly, as he thought, through Viborg, from Schlusselfburg, north-westward, in safety. He put all the money he possessed—not much, certainly—about his person in gold ; filled his cartridge-box with ammunition, and buckled on his sabre.

“ By this time to-morrow,” he muttered, as he glanced at his watch, “ the game will have been won or—lost ! ”

He then mounted, with a resolute heart, and set forth, having with him a light kabitka, or covered waggon, drawn by a single horse, and attended by his escort—six Malo-Russian Cossacks,

who wore the uniform of Hussars, and who were all stout, athletic, and noble-looking fellows, whose clean-limbed, active, and hardy little horses, unmatched for strength and speed, made Balgonie speculate painfully and anxiously on his slender chance of outstripping them, if pursued.

It was considerably past the noon of an October day—a dark, lowering, and ominous day—when they set out for Schlusselfburg, and ere long the rain began to fall heavily, soaking the Hussar finery of the Cossacks of the Guard; but Charlie Balgonie rode silently on at their head, heedless of the blinding torrents and the bellowing wind; though he little knew that as the darkness increased, and the early night drew on, that the waters of the lake and river were rising fast, and that a peril, of which he had no conception, already menaced the existence of Natalie.

But her voice seemed to be ever whispering in his ear—

“Carl, Carl—my beloved Carl, come to my aid—save me—help me, if you love me!”

When they were mid-way to Schlusselfburg, the kabitka driver, who was either sleepy or tipsy, fell awkwardly from his seat, and broke his right arm. What was to be done now?

No Cossack of the Guard would condescend to supply his place, and for more than an hour the party remained halted in a desolate spot, near a pine wood, while looking about to capture the

first peasant, serf, or civilian of any kind, whom they might meet, and press him into the service, as a temporary whip, in the employ of the Em-presse.

A skulking and somewhat sulky boor, in a fur cap and canvas caftan, leather leggings and bark shoes, who had been smoking his pipe under a great tree, was, erelong, discovered, dragged forward, and, with sundry oaths and threats, commanded to mount the shaft and act as driver, which he did, with a reluctance he was at no pains to conceal.

Knowing how necessary it was to control or to conciliate this new acquisition, Balgonie asked him a few questions, with sternness, but yet with politeness.

The serf was a singularly handsome young man, with eagle-like eyes, and an aquiline nose, that was almost hooked; he was without his mustache, which seemed to have been recently shaved off; but he had a curly red beard, with a complexion of well-nigh Asiatic darkness.

"Trust me, dear Carl Ivanovitch," said he, in a low and impressive voice, that was strangely familiar to Balgonie. "My disguise, I find, is complete indeed, when it deceives even you; but speak in French."

"Your disguise—yours?"

"Yes,—I am Apollo Usakoff," he added through his teeth.

"Heaven be blessed for this new omen of

success ! ” exclaimed Balgonie, in French. ‘ And you were not drowned ? ’ ”

“ No ; I swam down the Neva, under water, escaping many a bullet—got ashore, and reached the old place in the wood, where Olga, the gipsy, stained my face, trimmed and dyed, my beard, as you see. She is quite an artist, that girl ! Even Mariolizza would not know me now. ”

Balgonie sighed as the poor fellow spoke. Mutilated and disfigured as she was now, would he have known *her* ? He evidently knew nothing of the barbarities to which she had been subjected, so Balgonie resolved, mercifully, to keep him in ignorance ; and they proceeded at an easy pace together, he keeping his horse close by the shaft of the kabitka, on which the pretended peasant rode ; and, as they spoke in French, a language unknown to their ignorant and half-savage escort, Usakoff, in referring to the late event and its failure, poured out all the bitterness, the hate, and fury of his soul, against the Government, the Councillors, and the rule of the Empress ; and, of course, entered with fervour into the scheme of an escape with Natalie. But still their ultimate plans were undecided, when they saw the red flash of the evening gun, as it pealed from Schlüsselburg, amid the murky haze of a wet and stormy sunset ; and ere long they saw the lights that glittered at times from amid the massive towers and black outline of that old castle (the scene of so many terrors, sufferings, and atrocities)

streaming and wavering on the turbulent waters of the lake, and the wet slime of the sluices and ditches.

When, all dripping and jaded, the escort halted and dismounted under the castle arch, Balgonie found that some changes were taking place in the executive of the fortress.

Bernikoff, whose wounds had been inflamed to gangrene, by passion, rage, and vodka, was at that moment actually on his death-bed, with Father Chrysostom kneeling by his side. The old sinner was in all the agonies and terrors of reviewing his past life on one hand, and anticipating the coming change on the other. Many pounds of perfumed wax candles were flaming now round the effigy of St. Sergius, whom, in weak and querulous accents, he implored for intercession, alternately with the Chaplain, to whose cassock he clung tenaciously, and to whom he was mingling threats of punishment, if he permitted him to fare ill in the other world, or omitted masses for his soul's repose. And that superstition and absurdity might not be wanting amid this solemn but repulsive scene, from which Balgonie hurried away with more disgust than pity, Bernikoff was dying in the habit of a *friar*, with cowl, cord, beads, and sandals, hoping even on his death-bed, as Ivan the Terrible hoped, when similarly arrayed and disguised, to cheat the devil, if that dread personage came for his sinful soul.

The cowl and other paraphernalia he had ob-

tained from the Chamberlain, or wardrobe-keeper, of the Troitza monastery near the Louga—a cowl that had lain on the mummy of the uncorrupted saint in the silver shrine;—and almost with his last breath, he threatened Father Chrysostom with a drum-head court-martial for venturing to hint that this attempt to mask his past life was vain without true repentance.

Leaving this scene, Balgonie presented the order of General Weymarn and that of the Treasurer, to Captain Vlasief, who was now in command, and to whom he stated that “the prisoner referred to was Mademoiselle Natalie Mierowna.”

“Carl Ivanovitch,” said the Captain, “you cannot think of leaving to-night in such a storm of wind and rain?”

“I’ve seen worse in Silesia,” said Balgonie, looking to the locks of his pistols.

“What of that?”

“But the *verbal* order of the General was most peremptory.”

“Ah!—and you have brought a kabitka for the money?”

“A kabitka for the prisoner also—so be quick, Captain.”

“’Tis a large sum in roubles,” mused the other

“I am in haste to be gone!—the prisoner—you hear me, sir?” said Balgonie impatiently.

“By all the devils, you seem more anxious about the prisoner than the treasure!” responded

Vlasfief sulkily, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, but still delayed to move.

"You have my orders—I come in the name of the Empress—let there be no delay, Captain Vlasfief," was the curt reply.

"Bring in two Cossacks of the escort; the money is here in seventy bags, each containing a thousand roubles."

"Excuse me, but the order of the Imperial Treasurer says expressly *eighty* sealed bags of a thousand each," said Balgonie, trembling with anxiety, yet compelled to appear to take an interest when he really felt none.

"Ten thousand are missing," said Vlasfief, leisurely, refilling his pipe.

"Missing !"

"Yes. Suppose," he added in a whisper, "suppose we divide the lost sum between us, and offer a thousand to the Treasurer."

"Impossible, sir !" said Balgonie, with a fiery and impatient manner.

"Well, well—there are the other ten sealed bags," added Captain Vlasfief, with a dark and stealthy frown of greed and hate, as the Cossacks tossed the whole among the straw of the kabitka : "it matters little ; but I hope you may not find the road *beset*, and so lose the whole."

"To be forewarned, sir, is to be forearmed," said Balgonie, touching his pistols ; for he quite understood the treachery implied, and only trem-

bled lest it might mar his dearest plans. "And now, sir, for my prisoner."

"If she be not drowned; for the lower vaults are apt to be flooded on such a night as this," said Vlasfief spitefully.

Writhing under the keen glances of this low-born Muscovite, Balgonie felt that all now depended upon his outward and assumed bearing of coolness and carelessness. Night favoured him in this, and his face was almost concealed. Could any one then have read his heart, as he, Usakoff, two Cossacks, and two soldiers of the main-guard made their way down, down through dark and slimy passages and stairs, till they were foot deep and then knee deep in the water that flooded the low and humid corridors, off which were the arched doors of numerous cells—corridors where spiders spun their webs, rats were swimming, and terrified bats flew wildly to and fro!

Erelong they reached the door, through the crannies of which despairing cries and painful gaspings had been heard, and, after unlocking, forced it open by main strength.

"A great flood of water poured from the aperture amid the darkness," says the *Utrecht Gazette*, "and with it came the body of the poor lady, who was well-nigh drowned."

So the red light seen by Natalie was no fancy, but that of the lamp which was borne by one of those who came just in time to save her from

the same terrible death by which the Princess Orloff perished.

Lest all might be perilled by a recognition, Balgonie was compelled to retire and leave her in the Chaplain's hands till she was restored to consciousness, to warmth, and till she was habited anew; and he passed three dreadful hours of doubt and anxiety, while pacing to and fro in the cold and gloomy archways of the fortress, and having to conceal his face when she was brought forth and supported into the kabitka, to which two *fresh* horses were now traced. Usakoff sprang on the shaft and flourished his whip; then the Cossacks and Balgonie put spurs to their chargers, and clattered over the wet drawbridge, just as the passing bell for the departure of Bernikoff's tortured spirit rang ominously and solemnly on the stormy gusts of that black and gloomy night.

Balgonie, instead of proceeding by the way he had come, avoided the town of Schlusselfurg, and wheeled off to the right, committing himself partly to the guidance of Usakoff, and quite in ignorance that, about an hour before, Vlasief, who could by no means let so many roubles escape without paying toll, had beset two of the roads by chosen followers of his own—men whom he hoped might pass for some of the adherents of the late Prince Ivan, rescuing the daughter of the exiled Count Mierowitz.

A strange incident occurred before the inter-

ment of old Bernikoff, who had a pompous military funeral. The bottom of his grave was found to be on fire!

A Scottish doctor (named Rogerson, we believe) at Catharine's Court attempted to explain this phenomenon, as resulting from a species of ironstone which was saturated with the phosphorus supplied by the bones of old interments, and which had been ignited by the friction of the sexton's shovel; but the superstitious Russians took a very different and much more diabolical view of the matter, and laughed to scorn the learned opinion of the Scottish pundit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THEIR horses were tolerably refreshed by the halt at Schlusselfburg, and the nags which drew the light kabitka had been quite unused, so the whole party pushed on at a brisk pace, by the road towards the frontiers of Finland, the Cossacks of the escort, whatever they thought, making neither remark nor inquiry, as they trusted obediently and implicitly to the officer who led them ; but the darkness of the October morning, the deep and muddy, stony and rough, nature of the roads, and the violence of the storm, ere long began to have a severe effect upon their cattle, and, to the great satisfaction of Balgonie, two of the troopers gradually dropped to the rear, and were seen no more.

Now the Corporal of the Cossacks ventured to hint, that "perhaps they were not pursuing the way they had come, as the lights in St. Isaac's Cathedral must have been visible long ago ;" but Balgonie replied, haughtily and briefly, that he "had *special* orders."

Then the Corporal urged a short halt, as the

horses were sinking ; but again Balgonie replied, that he " had peculiar orders, and must push on."

After passing a little village with a windmill, several miles from the shore of the Lake of Ladoga, the road dipped down into a dark hollow, between impending crags of granite, the grey faces of which were already beginning to brighten in the first light of the lagging October sun. The rain and wind were over ; the hollow way was full of rolling and perplexing mist ; but Usakoff affirmed with confidence that he knew the country well.

Out of the grey vapour, from both sides of the path, there flashed, redly and luridly, five or six muskets ! One bullet struck white splinters from the kabitka eliciting a shriek from its occupant ; another whistled through the mane of Charlie's horse ; and a third killed one of the Cossacks, who died without a groan, for it passed fairly through his temples.

The way was beset by armed men, whose numbers and disposition the dim light, or, rather, the darkness and the mist, alike served to conceal.

" Make way, in the name of the Empress !" cried Balgonie, dashing forward, with his sabre drawn ; " Nay, I command you, on your peril and allegiance !" he added, as the threatening words of Vlasfief occurred to him ; and, to his astonishment and dismay, he saw that personage actually appear, mounted and armed, wearing a regimental hat and plume, with a kind of dark

green tunic, or patrol jacket, richly braided with gold, and trimmed heavily with black fur. His party, who seemed all on foot, were clad like peasants, but were armed with muskets, which they were rapidly casting about and reloading.

“Halt, in the name of the Empress—halt, I command you! for this is *not* the way to St. Petersburg, whither the prisoner and treasure were to be conveyed. Treason! treason!” shouted the Staff Captain Vlasfief.

Balgonie fired a pistol at his head; but the Captain’s horse reared, or was compelled to do so by bit and spur, for the bullet pierced its throat; and with an oath, Vlasfief fell on the pathway, entangled in the stirrups as the animal sank under him.

The three remaining Cossacks, who were somewhat bewildered by the attack, by the appearance of Vlasfief, whom they knew, and whose confident bearing confirmed certain gathering suspicions that something was wrong as to their route, now drew their sabres, aimed several blows at Usakoff’s head, and endeavoured to cut the reins of his horse, or stab it between the shafts, as he lashed the animal almost to racing speed, and the light kabitka jolted, rolled, and bounded along the rough road behind it.

By another pistol-shot Balgonie rid himself of the Cossack Corporal, whose bridle arm he broke, while facing about and galloping in rear of the kabitka; and now with wild hallooes, the entire

party of armed men followed it on foot, with all speed, up a steep slope, over which the path wound.

Usakoff ground his teeth, for he was without weapons, and passive in the flying combat; but, being fertile in expedients, he tore open a bag of roubles, and scattered them on the upland road with a ready and reckless hand.

The bright silver coins proved too exciting for the cupidity of the pursuers, who loitered to pick them up, tumbling, scrambling, rising and falling over each other, with shouts, curses, and maledictions, their fire-arms sometimes exploding the while; and so the whole were speedily left behind, as the kabitka, guarded now by Balgonie alone, was driven along a lonely and unfrequented road, that led to the little town of Pomphela.

"Thanks, dear Usakoff—thanks for your presence of mind," said Balgonie; "I had forgot all about those roubles."

"Silver has achieved for us what neither our lead or steel would have done!"

"But, to lighten the kabitka, let us throw out those remaining bags—this perilous lumber, the intended recapture of which has nearly cost us our lives—honour—all, at the hands of Vlasfief."

"Nay, nay, never! Lumber, say you? The roubles are Natalie's—hers and mine—hers and yours, when you wed her; they have saved us once, and may do so again," replied Usakoff cheer-

fully, as the sun burst forth in his clear October splendour, and they saw the dome-shaped cupola of the Church of Pomphela rising with a golden gleam from amid the white morning haze.

There Balgonie's uniform and a display of gold and roubles operated powerfully on the Postmaster, who, without asking for passports or other papers, at once, and in the name of the Empress, supplied them with fresh horses for the frontier, towards which, after procuring some proper nourishment and restoratives for Natalie, they pushed on without a moment of unnecessary delay.

"Ah," thought Balgonie, with a shudder and a prayer; "had Jagouski's name *not* been omitted in that order of Weymarn, where would she have been now?"

Pale with sorrow and long suffering, her face was still beautiful, though sorely wasted; the deep thoughtful eyes had yet a wealth—a world of tenderness in their liquid depths; and the long dark hair was thick, soft, and wavy as ever, as it fell in masses behind the small, compact, and finely-formed head.

Yet withal, her wretchedness had been extreme, having been so suddenly and rudely rent from all those habits of luxury and tender nurture, which had become, as it were, a second nature; and often, very often, had it occurred to her in her later misery of soul "that the repose of the grave is sweet, and that there cometh after death

a levelling and making even of things which would at last cure all her evils."

But all was changed now ; and, as she laid her head on Charlie's breast, she felt content—almost happy ; and the horrors that hung over her family alone prevented her, as yet, from being completely so.

No trace of pursuers were behind them now, though their flight must by this time have been known both in the capital and at Schlusselfburg. But in those days there were neither railroads nor electric telegraphs ; so, riding on more leisurely, Balgonie changed horses again near Viborg, and ere long the great Lake of Saima appeared before them, with the distant hills of Swedish Finland beyond its friendly waters.

A boat was procured there ; the kabitka was abandoned ; and, with a shout of joy, Usakoff assisted the Finnish boatman to hoist the great lug-sail to catch the breeze of a balmy and beautiful evening, as they bade a long farewell to Russia and all its terrors.

In a quaint old Church of Finland, by the eastern shore of the Lake of Saima, and in view of its little archipelago of granite isles,—a lonely little fane, buried amid groves of plum and cherry trees, built of wood and painted red, with a little holy bell jangling in its humble belfry,—Charlie Balgonie and his fugitive bride were united by the old Curate, with the consent of the Lutheran Bishop of Heinola ; and there a thousand roubles

spent among the poor spread in the primitive district a happiness, the tradition of which is still remembered with many a grateful exaggeration.

After this, poor Usakoff, finding himself perhaps, as a third person, rather in the way, left them to become a soldier of fortune; and he is supposed to have perished in one of the Polish struggles for freedom; at least, they heard of him no more, after their final journey to Scotland.

Two years before these events, it would appear that Charlie's uncle, "the godly and upright" Gamaliel Balgonie, merchant, magistrate, and elder, had departed in peace to sin no more, leaving the lands and possessions of Balgonie unimpaired; and a long tombstone in that famous city of the dead, the Howff of Dundee, records at length all the virtues which his contemporaries in general and the Presbytery in particular believed him to possess.

So Carl Ivanovitch became once more Balgonie of that ilk; and the roubles of Natalie added many a turret and many an acre to his patrimonial dwelling in beautiful Strathearn.

L'ENVOI.—ILLUSTRATIVE NOTE.

To convince the reader how nearly History has been followed in the previous pages, we shall take the liberty of inserting the subsequent manifesto, published with reference to the death of Ivan IV.

“By the Grace of God, we, Catharine the Second, Empress and Autocratrice of all the Russias, &c., &c., to all whom these presents may concern :

When by the divine will, and in compliance with the unanimous desires of our faithful subjects, we ascended the throne of Russia, we were not ignorant that Ivan, son of Anthony, Prince of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, and of the Princess Anne of Mecklenburg was still alive. This Prince, as is well known, was immediately after his birth unlawfully declared heir to the imperial crown ; *but*, by the decrees of Providence, he was soon after irrevocably excluded from that high dignity, and the sceptre was placed in the hands

of the lawful heiress, Elizabeth (daughter of Peter the Great), our beloved aunt of glorious memory.

“After we had ascended the throne, and offered up to Heaven our just thanksgivings, the first object that employed our thoughts, in consequence of *that humanity which is so natural to us*, was the unhappy situation of that Prince, who was *dethroned by divine Providence*, and had been unfortunate since his birth

“To prevent, therefore, ill-intentioned persons from giving him any trouble, or from making use of his name to disturb the public tranquillity, we gave him a guard, and placed about his person two officers, in whose fidelity and integrity we could confide. These were Captain Vlasfief and Lieutenant Tschekin, who, by their long military services deserved a suitable recompense, and a station in which they might pass quietly the remainder of their days. They were accordingly charged with the care of the Prince, and were strictly enjoined to let none approach him. Yet all these precautions were not sufficient. . . .

“A *Put-parooschick* (a sub-lieutenant) of the Regiment of Smolensko, a native of the Ukraine, Basil Mierowitz (grandson of the first rebel that followed Mazeppa), took it into his head to make use of this Prince, to advance his fortune at all events, without being restrained by a consideration of the bloody scene that such an attempt might occasion. In order to execute this detestable, dangerous, and desperate project, he con-

trived, during our absence in Livonia, to **be** upon guard in the fortress of Schlusselfurg, where the guard is relieved every eight days ; and the 15th of last month, about two in the morning, he called out the main guard, formed it in line, and ordered the soldiers to load with ball. Bernikoff, Governor of the fortress, came out of his apartment, and asked Mierowitz the reason of the disturbance, but received no other answer from this rebel than a blow with the butt-end of his musket.

“Captain Vlasfief and Lieutenant Tschekin seeing that it was impossible to resist such a superior force, and considering the unhappy consequences that must ensue from the deliverance of THE PERSON who was committed to their care, after deliberating together, took the only step that they thought proper to maintain public tranquillity, which was to *cut short the days of the unfortunate Ivan*. Mierowitz, on seeing the dead body of the Prince, was so confounded by a sight he so little expected, that he acknowledged his temerity and guilt, and discovered his repentance to the troops, whom, about an hour before, he had seduced from their duty, and rendered the accomplices of his crime.

“Then it was that the two officers who had nipped this rebellion in the bud, joined the Governor of the fortress in securing this rebel, and bringing back the soldiers to their duty. They also sent to our Privy Councillor Count

Paulin, under whose orders they acted, a relation of this event, which, though unhappy, has nevertheless, under the protection of Heaven, prevented still greater calamities. This Senator despatched immediately *Pulovnick* (Colonel) Caschkin, with sufficient instructions to maintain tranquillity on the spot (or where the assassination was committed), and sent us, at the same time, a circumstantial account of the whole affair. In consequence of this, we ordered Lieutenant-General Weymarn, of the division of St. Petersburg, to take the necessary information on the spot; and the confession of the villain himself, who has acknowledged his crime.

"Sensible of its enormity and consequences with regard to the peace of our country, we have referred the whole affair to the consideration of our Senate, which we have ordered, jointly with the Synod, to invite the three first classes and the Presidents of all the Colleges to hear the verbal relation of General Weymarn, who has taken the proper informations, to pronounce sentence in consequence thereof, and to present it to us, for confirmation of the same.

"CATHARINE."

By a singular species of sophistry, the guilt of Ivan's death is thus, by a subsequent document, transferred to Basil Mierowitz :—

"As the violent death of the unfortunate Prince Ivan was the immediate consequence of the despe-

rate attempt of Mierowitz, so must this officer be considered as the principal cause of this assassination—nay, even regarded as *the murderer of that unhappy Prince.*”

To this, five Russian Bishops appended their signatures.

Vlasief was made a General, and his Lieutenant a Colonel, in the following year, with a pension of ten thousand roubles each.

THE END.

ADVENTURES
OF
AN AIDE-DE-CAMP

BY
JAMES GRANT
AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR."

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JAMES GRANT'S NOVELS.

THE ROMANCE OF WAR.
THE AIDE-DE-CAMP.
THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER.
BOTHWELL.
JANE SETON; OR, THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE.
PHILIP BOLLO.
THE BLACK WATCH.
MARY OF LORRAINE.
OLIVER ELLIS; OR, THE FUSILIERS.
LUCY ARDEN; OR, HOLLYWOOD HALL.
FRANK HILTON; OR, THE QUEEN'S OWN.
THE YELLOW FRIGATE.
HARRY OGILVIE; OR, THE BLACK DRAGOONS.
ARTHUR BLANE.
LAURA EVERINGHAM; OR, THE HIGHLANDERS OF GLENORA.
THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.
LETTY HYDE'S LOVERS.
CAVALIERS OF FORTUNE.
SECOND TO NONE.
THE CONSTABLE OF FRANCE.
THE PHANTOM REGIMENT.
THE KING'S OWN BORDERERS.
THE WHITE COCKADE.
FIRST LOVE AND LAST LOVE.
DICK RODNEY.
THE GIRL HE MARRIED.
LADY WEDDERBURN'S WISH.
JACK MANLY.
ONLY AN ENSIGN.
THE ADVENTURES OF ROB ROY.
UNDER THE RED DRAGON.
THE QUEEN'S CADET.
SHALL I WIN HER?
FAIRER THAN A FAIRY.
ONE OF THE SIX HUNDRED.
MORLEY ASHTON.
DID SHE LOVE HIM?
THE ROSS-SHIRE BUFFS.

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ADVENTURES

OF AN

A I D E - D E - C A M P.

CHAPTER I

THE LANDING, IN CALABRIA.

ON the evening of the last day of June, 1806, the transports which had brought our troops from Sicily anchored off the Italian coast, in the Bay of St. Eufemio, a little to the southward of a town of that name.

The British forces consisted of H. M. 27th, 58th, 78th, and 81st regiments of the line, the provisional light infantry and grenadier battalions, the Corsican Rangers, Royal Sicilian Volunteers, and the regiment of Sir Louis de Watteville, &c., the whole being commanded by Major-General Sir John Stuart, to whose personal staff I had the honour to be attached.

This small body of troops, which mustered in all only 4,795 rank and file, was destined by our ministry to support the Neapolitans, who in many places had taken up arms against the usurper Joseph Buonaparte, and to assist in expelling from Italy the soldiers of his brother. Ferdinand, king of Naples, after being an abject vassal of Napoleon, had allowed a body of British and Russian soldiers to land on his territories without resistance. This expedition failed; he was deserted by the celebrated Cardinal Ruffo, who became a Buonapartist; and as the French emperor wanted a crown for his brother Joseph, he proclaimed that "the Neapolitan dynasty had ceased to reign"—that the race of Parma were no longer kings in Lower Italy—and in January, 1806, his legions crossed the frontiers. The "lazarona king" fled instantly to Palermo; his spirited queen, Carolina (sister of the unfortunate Marie

Antoinette), soon followed him; and the usurper Joseph, after meeting with little or no resistance, was, in February, crowned king of Naples and Sicily, in the church of Santo Januario, where Cardinal Ruffo of Scylla performed solemn mass on the occasion. All Naples and its territories submitted to him, save the brave mountaineers of the Calabrias, who remained continually in arms, and with whom we were destined to co-operate.

When our anchors plunged into the shining sea, it was about the close of a beautiful evening—the hour of Ave Maria—and the lingering light of the Ausonian sun, setting in all his cloudless splendour, shed a crimson glow over the long line of rocky coast, burnishing the bright waves rolling on the sandy beach, and the wooded mountains of Calabria, the abode of the fiercest banditti in the world.

The tricolor flaunted over the towers of St. Amantea, a little town to the northward of the bay, commanded by a castle on a steep rock, well garrisoned by the enemy; and the smoke of their evening gun curled away from the dark and distant bastions, as the last vessel of our armament came to anchor. The whole fleet, swinging round with the strong current which runs through the Strait of Messina, lay one moment with their sterns to the land and the next to the sparkling sea, which pours through between these rock-bound coasts with the speed of a mill-race.

Italy lay before us: the land of the fabled Hesperia—the country of the “eternal city;” and I thought of her as she was once: of “majestic Rome,” in all her power, her glory, and her military supremacy; when nations bowed their heads before her banners, and her eagles spread their wings over half a world. But, alas! we find it difficult to recognise in the effeminate Venetian, the revengeful Neapolitan, or the ferocious Calabrian, the descendants of those matchless soldiers, whose pride, valour, and ambition few since have equalled, and none have yet surpassed. We viewed with the deepest interest that classic shore, which so many of us now behold for the first time. To me, it was a country teeming with classic recollections—the sunny and beautiful land whose very history has been said to resemble a romance; but the mass of our soldiers were, of course, strangers to all these sentiments; the grave and stern Ross-shireman, and the brave bog-trotters of Inniskilling, regarded it only as a land of hard marches, short rations, and broken heads; as a hostile coast, where the first soldiers of the continent were to be encountered and overcome—for with us these terms are synonymous.

Barbarized by the wars and ravages which followed the

French revolution and invasion,—swarming with disorderly soldiers, savage brigands, and starving peasantry writhing under the feudal system—the Naples of that time was very different from the Naples of to-day, through which so many tourists travel with luxurious safety: at least so far as the capital. Few, I believe, penetrate into that terra incognita, the realm of the bandit Francстриpa.

Orders were despatched by the general from ship to ship, that the troops should be held in readiness to disembark by dawn next day. The quarter-guards and deck-watches were strengthened for the night, and strict orders given to sentries not to permit any communication with the shore, or with the numerous boats which paddled about among the fleet. Our ships were surrounded by craft of all shapes and sizes, filled with people from St. Eufemio, and other places adjacent: bright-eyed women, their dark hair braided beneath square linen head-dresses, with here and there a solitary “gentiluomo,” muffled in his cloak, and ample hat, beneath which glowed the red spark of a cigar; meagre and grizzled priests; wild-looking peasantry, half naked, or half covered with rough skins; and conspicuous above all, many fierce-looking fellows, wearing the picturesque Calabrian garb, of whose occupation we had little doubt: the gaiety of their attire, the long dagger gleaming in their sashes, the powder-horn, and the well-oiled rifle slung across the back by a broad leather sling, proclaimed them brigands; who came crowding among their honest countrymen, to hail and bid us welcome as allies and friends.

An hour before daylight next morning, we were all on deck and under arms. Our orders were, to land with the utmost silence and expedition, in order to avoid annoyance from the light guns of the French, who occupied the whole province from sea to sea, and whom we fully expected to find on the alert to oppose our disembarkation.

My first care was to get my horse, Cartouche, into one of the boats of the *Amphion* frigate. Aware that sharp work was before us, I personally superintended his harnessing; having previously given him a mash with a dash of nitre in it, and had his fetlocks and hoofs well washed, and his eyes and nostrils sponged with vinegar, to freshen him up after the close confinement of the ship: he was then carefully slung over the side, by a “whip” from the yard-arm. The oars dipped noiselessly into the waves, and we glided away to the beach of St. Eufemio, the point marked out for our landing-place. I stood by Cartouche’s head, holding the reins shortened in my hand, and stroking his neck to quiet him; for the fiery blood-horse had shown so much impatience when the

ears dipped into the water, or the boat heaved on the heavy ground swell, that his hoofs threatened every instant to start a plank and swamp us.

All the boats of the fleet were now in requisition; and, being crowded to excess with soldiers accoutred with their knapsacks and arms, and freighted with baggage, cannon, and tumbrils, miners' tools, and military stores to arm and clothe the Calabrese, they were pulled but slowly towards the point of rendezvous. The last boat had no sooner landed its freight, than the ship of the admiral, Sir Sydney Smith, fired a gun, and the fleet of frigates and gun-boats weighed anchor, and stood off northwards, to attack the castle of St. Amanthea; against which, operations were forthwith commenced by the whole naval armament.

The lofty coast loomed darkly through a veil of haze; the morning air was chill, and a cold sea-breeze swept over the black billows of the straits; against the effects of which I fortified myself with my comfortable, double-caped cloak, a cigar, and a mouthful from a certain convenient flask, which experience had taught me to carry always in my sabretache. The time was one of keen excitement, even to me, who had served at the siege of Valetta, and in other parts of the Mediterranean, and shared in many a memorable enterprise, which has added to our empire the valuable posts and possessions we hold in that part of Europe. As the daylight increased, and the sun rose above the mountains, pouring a flood of lustre over the straits of the Faro, the scene appeared of surpassing beauty. Afar off, in the direction of the Lipari, the sea assumed its deepest tint of blue; while the whole Bay of St. Eufemio seemed filled with liquid gold, and the white waves, weltering round the base of each distant promontory, were dashed from the volcanic rocks in showers of sparkling silver; all the varied hues which ocean assumes under an Italian sky were seen in their gayest splendour. The picturesque aspect of this romantic shore was heightened by the appearance of our armament; as the debarking corps formed open column of companies on the bright yellow beach, their lively uniforms of scarlet, green, and white, the standards waving, and lines of burnished bayonets glistening in the sun—which seemed to impart a peculiarly joyous lustre to all it shone upon—the scene was spirit-stirring.

The white walls and church tower of the little town, the foliage of the surrounding forest, backed by the lofty peaks of the Calabrian Apennines—the winding strip of golden sand fringing the fertile coast, and encircling the wave-beaten rocks, where a fisherman sat mending his nets and singing,

perhaps of Thomas Aniello—the remote Sicilian shore, and the wide expanse of sea and sky were all glowing in one glorious blaze of light—the light of an Italian sunrise, beneath whose effulgence the face of nature beams bright with sparkling freshness and roseate beauty.

Our nine battalions of infantry now formed close column; while the royal artillery, under Major Lemoine, got their eleven field-pieces and two howitzers into service order, the tumbrils hooked to the guns, and the horses traced to the carriages. During these preparations the general kept me galloping about between the different commanding officers with additional instructions and orders; for we expected to be attacked every moment by the enemy, of whose arrangements we had received a very confused account from the peasantry.

As the sun was now up, the rare beauty of the country was displayed to the utmost advantage; but we scanned the lofty mountains, the romantic gorges, the grim volcanic cliffs and bosky thickets, only to watch for the glitter of French steel; for the flutter of those standards unfurled so victoriously at Arcole, Lodi, and Rivoli; or for the puff of white smoke which announces the discharge of a distant field-piece. Strange to say, not the slightest opposition was made to our landing, although there were many commanding points from which a few light guns would have mauled our boats and battalions severely.

The troops remained quietly in close column at quarter distance, with their arms ordered, until command was given to unfurl all colours, and examine flints and priming. A reconnoitring party was then pushed forward to “feel the ground,” and our little army got into marching order, and advanced to discover what the distance of a few miles would bring forth. The Corsican Rangers were the skirmishers.

“Sir John,” said I, cantering up to the general, “permit me to join the light troops, that I may see what goes on in front?”

“You may go, Dundas,” he replied; “but remember, they are under the command of Major Kraünz, who, I believe, is no friend of yours.”

“No, truly; there is no man I would like better to see knocked on the head; and so, *allons!* Sir John.”

“Be attentive to his orders, however,” said he, with a grave nod, as I bowed and dashed off.

Kraünz! yes, I had good reason to hate the name, and curse its owner. I had a brother who belonged to a battalion of these Rangers. He was a brave fellow, Frank; and had

served with distinction at Malta, and under Charles Stewart at the siege of Calvi; and, after Sir John Moore, was the first man over the wall at the storming of the Mozello fort. But his career was a short one. Between Frank and Kraünz there arose a dispute, a petty jealousy about some pretty girl at Palermo; a challenge ensued, and Frank was put under arrest for insubordination. From that moment he was a marked man by the brutal German, who was resolutely bent upon his ruin—and a military man alone can know what the unhappy officer endures who is at strife with an uncompromising, vindictive, and perhaps vulgar, commanding officer. Thank God! there are few such in our service. Frank's proud spirit could ill brook the slights and insults to which Kraünz subjected him; and being one day "rowed" publicly for coming five minutes late to parade, in the height of his exasperation he struck down the German with the sword he was lowering in salute, and was, in consequence, placed instantly under close arrest. A court-martial dismissed him from that service in which he had gained so many scars. His heart was broken; the disgrace stung him to the soul. He disappeared from Sicily, and from the hour he left his regiment could never be discovered by our family. Therefore, it cannot be wondered at that I cared but little about the safety of his German enemy.

The advanced party, under the command of Kraünz, consisted of three companies of Corsican Rangers; these moved in double quick time along the narrow highway towards the mountains, from which the hardy peasantry soon came pouring down, greeting us with cries of "Long live Ferdinand of Bourbon! long live our holy faith!" I galloped after the Corsicans, in high spirits at the prospect of seeing something more exciting than was usually afforded by the lounging life I had spent in the garrisons of Sicily—dangling about the royal palace, or the quarter-general, drinking deep and late in our mess-room at Syracuse, or smoking cigars among the promenaders on the Marina of "Palermo the Happy." My brave Cartouche appeared to rejoice that he trod once more on firm earth; curveting, neighing, and tossing his proud head and flowing mane, while he snuffed the pure breeze from the green hills with dilated and quivering nostrils.

It was a soft and balmy morning; the vast blue vault above was free from the faintest fleece of cloud, and pervaded by the deep cerulean hue so peculiar to this enchanting climate. At that early hour, not a sound stirred the stillness of the pure atmosphere, save the twittering of the merry birds, as they fluttered from spray to spray, or the measured tramp

of feet and clanking of accoutrements, as the smart light troops in their green uniform moved rapidly forward—the glazed tops of their caps, their tin canteens and bright musket-barrels, flashing in the light of the morning sun.

As we advanced into the open country, the scenery rapidly changed; the sandy beach, the bold promontory, and sea-beaten rock, gave place to the vine-clad cottage and the wooded hill. Some antique tomb, a rustic fountain, or a time-worn cross, half sunk in earth, often adorned the way-side; the white walls of a convent, embosomed among luxuriant orange-trees, or an ancient oratory, with its carved pilasters and gray arches, occasionally met the eye; while the dark arcades of a vast and rained aqueduct stretched across the valley, and the ramparts of a feudal *castello* frowned from the mountains above—the ruddy hue of its time-worn brick, or ferruginous rock, harmoniously contrasting with the bronzed foliage of dense forests, forming the back-ground of the view. The air was redolent with the perfume of roses, and myriads of other flowers, which flourished in the wildest luxuriance on every side; while the gigantic laurel, the vine, with its purple fruitage, the graceful acacia, and the glossy *lex*, alternately cast their shadows across our line of march.

All this was delightful enough, no doubt: but a rattling volley of musketry, which flashed upon us from amid the dark masses of a wood we were approaching, brought a dozen of our party to the ground, and the whole to a sudden halt.

“Live Joseph, king of Naples!” cried the French commanding officer, brandishing his sabre. “Another volley, my braves!”

But before his last order could be obeyed, our own fire was poured upon his light troops, whose pale green uniform could scarcely be distinguished from the foliage, among which they had concealed themselves in such a manner as completely to enfilade the highway. Shot dead by the first fire, Kraünz rolled from his saddle beneath the hoofs of my horse, and his glaring eyes glared upwards on me for a second. Perhaps I answered by a scowl: for I thought of my brother Frank.

Disconcerted by his sudden fall, and staggered by the unexpected fire in front and flank, the Corsicans would have shown the white feather—in other words, fled—had I not set a proper example to their officers, by leaping from Cartouches and putting myself at their head.

“Forward, Corsicans. Remember Paolo! Follow me! Charge!” And with levelled bayonets they plunged through the thicket, regardless of what the enemy’s strength might be.

Hand to hand with the musket and sabre, we dashed head-

long into the wood, and engaged the *tirailleurs*, with whom the contest was sharp. We lost several men, and I received a slight wound on the left arm from a young sub, whom we afterwards discovered to be the son of General Regnier; but a party of our own troops, led by Colonel Oswald, rushing with impetuosity on the flanks of the French, decided the issue of this our first encounter with them in Italy. We dislodged the little band from ambush, taking two hundred prisoners, and killing, or putting to flight, as many more. Captain De Viontessancourt, who commanded them, escaped with the survivors. These French troops proved to be a detachment of the 23rd light infantry.

Leaving a party to guard our prisoners, we followed cautiously the retreating *tirailleurs* through the great forest of St. Eufemio, and along the highway towards Maida, exchanging a skirmishing fire the whole way: many men were killed, or severely wounded, and left to become a prey to lynxes and wolves. As little honour and no advantage seemed likely to accrue from this unpleasant work, Oswald ordered a halt to be sounded, and drew the skirmishers together, until our main body appeared; when, by command of the general, a position was taken up on advantageous ground, supplied with wood and water, while the necessary advanced picquets were despatched to the different points and roads around it.

Here we formed an intrenched camp, expecting to be joined by some of the Calabrian noblesse and people, and to hear certain intelligence of the movements of the enemy, whose strongest force lay at Reggio, under the command of Regnier, a general of division.

CHAPTER II.

THE PIGTAIL.

Soon after halting, we received intelligence of the successful issue of Sir Sydney Smith's attack on the castle of St. Amanthea; a strong fort, which, being quite inaccessible on the land side, he carried by assault on the seaward, capturing four hundred prisoners, and a quantity of arms and military stores.

In the evening, I was despatched by Sir John to a young Neapolitan noble; who, in anticipation of our expedition, had some time before secretly quitted Palermo, and had been residing among his countrymen, for the purpose of ascertaining their sentiments towards the British as allies, and the pro-

bable number that would rise in arms, on our displaying the Union-Jack in Italy.

This personage, to whom I took a letter from the general, bore the titles of visconte di Santugo, and grand bailiff of Lower Calabria, and was the most powerful feudatory in the provinces. Our leader requested that he would use all his influence to arouse the peasantry to arms, for the service of his majesty the king of Naples, in support of whose cause our expedition had now landed on the Italian shore. We soon found, however, that the hardy Calabrese required no other incentive than their own intense hatred and deep-rooted detestation of the French. I had been ordered to return next morning with any volunteers the visconte could collect; and was not averse from the prospect of remaining a night at his villa, as my undressed wound was becoming a little troublesome.

At that time, the two Calabrias, the Abruzzi, and all the Italian mountains and fastnesses, were swarming with hordes of armed peasantry—half patriots and half bandits. This system of disorganization and immorality was promoted by a mortal hatred—the rancorous enmity of Italian hearts—against the usurper Buonaparte, and his slavish law of conscription; which aimed at the military enrolment of all classes, without distinction or permitting substitution. The proud noble, who could trace his name and blood to the warriors and senators of ancient Rome, and the humble peasant were to be alike torn from their homes, turned into the ranks as private soldiers, and sent forth, at the pleasure of this foreign tyrant, to fight and to perish among the wild sierras of Spain, or the frozen deserts of Russia. In consequence of this invasion of the rights of the Italian people, many young men of high birth, and others whose condition in life had, previous to the French aggression, been respectable, now fled to the mountains and wilderness, and became outlaws, rather than yield submission to the yoke of a Corsican conqueror. Ranged under various leaders, these spirited desperadoes, in conjunction with the banditti and the Loyal Masse, harassed the French incessantly, by a guerilla warfare of attacks, skirmishes, and assassinations; and with such effect, that Buonaparte computed his loss by the stiletto and rifle at not less than twenty thousand soldiers, during his attempts to subdue the brave outlaws of the Calabrian mountains.

In every town there was a French garrison, and every garrison had its prison-house, which was filled with those whom the French chose to designate rebels: these they put to death by scores; waging against the unhappy *paesani* a war

of extermination, and maintaining it with a cruelty unworthy of the heroes of Arcole and Marengo, and the representatives of the boasted "first nation in Europe." By sentence of a drum-head court-martial, and more often without the form of a trial, the poor peasants were shot to death in vast numbers; and their bodies, after being suspended on gibbets for a day or two, were cast into an immense pit dug close by, in order that the gallows might be clear for the next detachment of victims brought in by the troops employed in scouring and *riding down* the country. These outrages considered, it was no matter of wonder to us that the country rose *en masse* on our landing, and that the Neapolitan cry of "Ferdinando nostro, e la Santa Fede!" rang from the shores of the Mediterranean to the waves of the Adriatic.

As I rode from the camp on my solitary mission towards St. Eufemio, I thought of the lawless state of the country, and could not but feel a little anxious about my personal safety: the gay trappings of a staff uniform were likely to excite the cupidity of some villanous bandit, or unscrupulous patriot. What scattered parties of the French might be lurking in the great forest, I knew not; but an encounter with them seemed preferable to one with the Calabrian brigands,—of whose atrocious ferocity I had heard so many horrible stories circulated by the gossiping Sicilians, in the gardens and cafés, the salons and promenades, of Palermo. My first adventure gave me a vivid, but rather unpleasant, illustration of the fierce manners and unsettled state of the country we had come to free from invaders.

While crossing a rustic bridge, the parapets on each side of which were garnished with an iron cage, containing a human head in a ghastly state of decay, my ears were shocked, my eyes had been, by the cries and exclamations of a man in great agony and terror. Quickening the speed of Cartouch from a trot to a gallop, and unbuttoning my holster-flaps in readiness for drawing my pistols, I rode towards the place whence these outcries proceeded. In a rocky hollow by the wayside, I beheld a Sicilian struggling desperately with about twenty armed ruffians, whom I had no hesitation in believing to be banditti. They were all handsome and athletic men, in whose appearance there was something at once striking, picturesque, and sufficiently alarming. All wore high, conical, Calabrian hats, encircled by a broad red riband, that streamed over the right shoulder; jackets and breeches of bright-coloured stuffs, ornamented with a profusion of tags, tassels, and knots, and girt round the waist with a scarlet sash of Palmi silk; and leathern gaiters, laced saltire-wise up the legs with

sed straps : a musket, dagger, and powder-horn completed their equipments. Coal-black hair streamed in extravagant profusion over their shoulders ; long locks being esteemed in the Calabrias a sign of loyalty to the king and enmity to the French : thus, the extent of a man's patriotism was determined by the length of his hair. But the unfortunate Sicilian in their hands was destitute alike of flowing curls and twisted pig-tail ; hence his captors, supposing him unquestionably to be a traitor (or at least not a true subject to King Ferdinand), in having conformed to the fashion of the French, were determined to punish him in the mode which the wild spirits of these lawless provinces adopted towards those who fell into their hands with hair shorn short,—the head having become, since the commencement of the war, “ the political index by which they judged whether men were Jacobins, Bourbonists,” or Buonapartists.

The brigands greeted my approach with a shout of welcome ; and, while I was deliberating how best to interfere and save from their fury the unhappy man, he called upon me piteously for aid ; saying that he “ was a poor tanner of Palermo—a follower of our camp—and one who knew nothing of the fashions of Calabria !” But I was too late to yield him the least assistance, for the horrible punishment was inflicted the moment I drew bridle : and, in truth, I did not feel very chivalric in his cause, on learning that he was one of the villainous tanners of Palermo,—that community of assassins so terrible to all Sicily.

The right hand of the poor wretch was chopped off with a bill-hook, and thrust bleeding into his mouth, which they compelled him to open by pressing the hilt of a poniard behind his right ear. A sheep's tail was then fastened to the back of his head, to supply the deficiency of hair ; and bidding him wear it in remembrance of Francatropa, the whole party, after kicking him soundly, bade me “ good evening,” and vanished among the rocks. The mutilated tanner lay on the ground, writhing in agony of body and bitterness of spirit, calling on San Marco the glorious, Santa Rosalia of Sicily, San Zeno, the blessed Madonna of Philerma, and innumerable other saints, to ease him of his pain ; but, as none of these spiritual potentates seemed disposed to assist him, he then applied to mortal me.

Dismounting, I raised him from the ground, and, tearing my handkerchief into bandages, bound up the stump of his arm to stanch the blood ; he bemoaning his misfortune in piteous terms. He had a wife and children, he said, who must perish now, unless the Conciarotti (tanners) of Palermo—to

whose unruly corporation he belonged—would support them.

"Oh! *excellenza*," he added, "believe me, I am no traitor: and surely the want of my hair will not make me one. I fell in with a French patrol, who compelled me to cut off my long hair, in token of submission to King Peppo." (Peppo, a contraction of Giuseppe, or Joseph, was the name by which Joseph Buonaparte was commonly known.) "Maledictions drive them from purgatory to the deepest dens of hell! They have destroyed me, curses upon them! May they all hang as high as Tournoni the cardinal, and may their bones bleach white in the rain and the sunshine! Had I lost the left hand, instead of the right, I could still have revenged myself. *Maledetto*! Oh! blood for blood! Am I not one of the *Conciarotti*, at whose name the king quakes, at Naples, and his viceroy, at Palermo? But, oh! *Madonna mia*, never can revenge be mine; for the hand that is gone can grasp the *acciaro* no more!" And thus cursing and lamenting, he rolled on the grass till he foamed at the mouth. I was obliged to leave him, and pursue my journey.

By the road-side, I passed some of the bodies of those who had fallen in the skirmish of the morning. Stripped by the peasantry, they had lain all day sweltering under a burning sun; and now the vultures were screaming and flapping their wings, as they settled in flocks wherever one of these poor fellows lay unburied, with his blackened and gory wounds exposed to the gaze of every passer-by.

At the gate of St. Eufemio, I told several persons, who were lounging and smoking under the shadow of the walls, of the condition in which I had left the tanner among the rocks; but, instead of going immediately to his assistance, they only cursed him as a traitorous Sicilian.

"He is some false follower of Joseph the Corsican—*cospetto*! Let him die!—yes, die like a dog," was the answer I received on all sides.

On entering the town, I was greeted by the shouts of the people, who had donned the red cockade of the Neapolitan king. Gentlemen bowed, and ladies smiled and waved their handkerchiefs from verandahs and sun-shaded windows; women held their children aloft at arms' length, and the ragged artisan flourished his broad straw hat over the half-door of his shop; all joining in the general burst of welcome, and cries of "Long life to King Giorgio of Great Britain."

While riding through the principal street, with all the hurry and importance of an aide-de-camp bearing the fate of empires and of armies in his sabretache, I could behold on

every hand the traces of that dreadful earthquake which, two hundred years before, had overwhelmed the ancient and once-opulent city, converting it in a moment into a vast fetid marsh. Here and there stood a palace, rearing its time-worn façade, amid the miserable houses or filthy hovels of which the modern St. Eufemio is principally composed; while fragments of columns, crumbling capitals, and shattered entablatures, still lay strewn on every side.

The mansion of the podesta, or mayor, and of Ser Villani, the principal lawyer, as well as others of a better description, bore marks of French violence and rapine. Torn from its foundations, lay a column with the arms of Luigi d'Alfieri, the grand bailiff, carved upon it; here lay a statue, there a fountain broken to pieces; the madonnas at the street-corners were all demolished, the niches empty, the lamps gone; and many gaps appeared on each side of the way, where houses had been pulled down for firewood, or wantonly burned by the brigade of the marchese di Monteleone—a Buonapartist commander, whom common report declared to be an Englishman. All the stately trees that once bordered the Marina, or promenade, along the sea-shore, had been cut away and destroyed; probably, less from necessity than for the purpose of annoying the people; for the French, if allowed to be the most gallant nation, are also considered the most reckless soldiers in Europe.

CHAPTER III.

VISCONTE DI SANTUGO.

THE villa of the visconte di Santugo was some distance beyond St. Eufemio, and my way towards it lay along the desolate Marina.

The appearance of the bay, studded with our fleet of transports and men-of-war, was beautiful; its deep blue was now fast changing to bright gold and crimson, in the deep ruddy glow of the setting sun. The calm sea shone like a vast polished mirror, in whose bright surface the rocky headlands and the yellow beach, the picturesque little town of St. Eufemio, and the castles on the cliffs, with the little groups of white cottages that nestled under their battlements as if for protection, and the stately frigates, with their yards squared, and open ports bristling with cannon, were all reflected: every form and tint as vividly defined below the surface as above.

Situated upon the margin of the bay, stood the residence

of the grand bailiff. It was a large and imposing edifice, and, though not a perfect model of architecture, presented a very fair example of the ancient Roman blended with the modern Italian style. Designed by the old architect Giacomo della Porta, the villa occupied the site of the ancient castle of St. Hugo, which had withstood many a fierce assault during the wars with the Norman kings of Sicily, the Saracens, and other invaders: it had also been the scene of a cruel act of bloodshed, during the revolt of Campanella the Dominican. The castle suffered so much from the earthquake of 1560, that the then visconte demolished the ruins, and engrafted upon them the more modern Italian villa, which I was now approaching. A large round tower of dark-red brickwork, with ponderous crenelated battlements, reared its time-worn front above the erection of the sixteenth century. It was a fragment of the ancient Castello di Santugo, and its superstructure rose on the foundations of a Grecian, Roman, or Gothic fortress, of unknown name and antiquity. From its summit the standard of Naples waved heavily in the light evening wind.

A rustic lodge and gate gave entrance to an avenue, that wound with snake-like turnings through the verdant grounds, embosomed among groves of orange and olive trees. Above these rose the old tower and the modern minarets with gilded vanes; while the heavy balustraded terraces and projecting cornices of the villa were seen at intervals, standing forward in bold relief or sunk in deep shadow, as the evening sun, now sinking into the Mediterranean, shed bright gleams of gold and purple upon its broken masses. A part of the edifice projected from the rocks, and supported upon arches, overhanging the sea. The chambers in that damp quarter of the mansion were fitted up in the style of marine grottos; with mosaic-work, shells, marble, and many-coloured crystals, interspersed with fountains, where groups of water-gods spouted forth ample streams from conches and horns of bronze. These grottos afford a cool and silent retreat during the heat of the day, and a magnificent scene for an entertainment, or a ball *al fresco*, when illuminated by night.

The avenue, which was bordered on each side by statues of heathen deities, antique marble vases filled with flowers, and carved fragments of ancient temples, led to the portico; where a range of lofty Corinthian columns supported a pediment, ornamented with the arms of the noble house of Alfieri, collared with three orders of Italian knighthood.

On the smooth lawn in front, a group of girls—probably the servants of the mansion—danced to the tinkling notes of

the mandolin, the sound of the tabor, and their own musical voices. The picturesque garb, and stately Ausonian forms of these "deep-bosomed maids," with their jetty tresses and sparkling eyes, lent additional charms to a scene which, to me, was equally new and interesting. A few young men, in the Calabrian costume, were of the party; and I was not less pleased with their regular and manly features, agile air, and classic elegance of form, than with the softer graces of their bright-eyed companions. On my approach, they abandoned their amusement, and retired with something very like precipitation: a red coat was new to the Calabrians; with whom the appearance of a soldier was always associated with the rapine and violence of French foraging-parties.

The *chasseur*, or courier—that indispensable appendage to a great continental household—approached me, bowing obsequiously, with cocked hat in hand. He was an old, iron-visaged and white-mustachioed Albanian Greek, descended from the followers of Scanderbeg; thousands of whose posterity are yet to be found in the Calabrias. The courier rejoiced in the classic name of Zacheo Andronicus, and spoke an uncouth sort of Italian. His stern aspect, and splendid green livery, laced with gold and mounted with massive shoulder-knots; his heavy boots and spurs, scarlet sash, and *couteau-de-chasse*, or hanger, made him altogether a formidable-looking fellow, and enabled him to maintain his position as the attendant of the visconte and the head of the numerous household. Bidding me welcome in the name of his lord, the courier desired a servant named Giacomo to take my horse to the stables in the wing. Giacomo—a spruce Italian, clad in a blue open-necked shirt, bright yellow-sleeved vest, and blue-striped breeches, girt about with a gorgeous scarlet sash, who acted in the capacity of sub-major-domo—replied to the order of the Greek with a scowl, and desired another man to approach; to whom I resigned the bridle of *Cartouche*.

On entering the marble vestibule, I was met by the visconte, who embraced me in the usual fashion; bestowing a kiss on my cheek with that theatrical air of friendship which is so truly continental, and surprises the more phlegmatic but warm-hearted Briton. However, having been pretty well used to such greetings while quartered in Sicily, I returned with a good grace the salutation of Santugo; whom I found to be a handsome young man about five-and-twenty (my own age), and of singularly noble aspect. His address was polished and captivating; the brilliancy of his large eyes gave a pleasing animation to his countenance, and lent a

charm to his decided manner. His black mustachio, twisted on his upper lip, his short black hair (he was beyond the suspicion of Jacobinism), and closely-buttoned sopraveste of dark-coloured velvet, gave him somewhat of a military air. When he spoke or laughed, he had more of the Calabrian mountaineer in his tone and expression, than of the oily condescension and excessive politeness of the Italian noble; who, notwithstanding his many quarters and crests, and his boasted descent from the heroes of Rome and Magna Græcia, is too often a base and treacherous libertine—perhaps a coward.

What I took to be the jewelled pommel of a concealed poniard, sparkled at times beneath his vest (it was a time and country in which no unarmed man was safe); and suspended by a scarlet riband from a button-hole, the little star of a Sicilian order glittered on his breast. His shirt-collar, of the richest lace, was left negligently open, the evening being sultry; a short cloak, or mantello, was thrown over his left arm, and a broad hat of light brown beaver, encircled by an embroidered riband, was held under his right; completing a costume which made his whole appearance sufficiently striking, when viewed in that lofty and magnificent vestibule; where the falling waters of a fountain, statues of the purest marble, and gilded cornices and pilasters, were gleaming in the rays of the setting sun, which streamed through four tall latticed windows.

Introducing myself as Lieutenant Claude Dundas, of his Britannic majesty's 62nd regiment, and aide-de-camp to Sir John Stuart, I presented him with the despatch, and added something to its import; observing how much we stood in need of immediate reinforcement from the Calabrian barons, in consequence of the smallness of our force.

..“Signor, you have but anticipated me,” said the visconte. “The moment I heard of your disembarkation on the coast, I hoisted the Winged-Horse of Naples on the villa, and beat up for recruits. I have already mustered many, in addition to those peasantry over whom, as hereditary feudatorio, I have distinct authority and power. These men served under me when the troops of Naples drove the French generals Championnet and Macdonald from Rome; and, from their courage and character, they will, I have no doubt, be a very acceptable aid to your general.”

“Monsignore Luigi,” I replied, bowing, “how can he sufficiently thank you?”

“By permitting me to take, as usual, the supreme command over them; in truth, Signor Claude, they will scarcely

obey any one else. At their head, I have already seen some hard service at Rome and in Apulia; where I fought in three pitched battles under the Cardinal Ruffo, when he was a loyal man, and true to Italy. In those days, how little could we have dreamed that the Cardinal Prince of Scylla would become a traitor, and of such unhappy fame? I have fought well and hard for Italy," continued the visconte, as we ascended the staircase, "and would still have continued in open hostility against Peppo the Corsican; but I left the army in disgust, at certain slighting expressions used towards me on a recent occasion, by his majesty of Naples; who ought in person to lead on his people to death or victory, instead of eating his maccheroni at Palermo, like a coward as he is!"

"Harsh words, my lord!"

"Not more harsh than true. Know, signor, that the high spirit of Carolina alone keeps the cause of liberty alive in the hearts of the Neapolitan people. Oh! for a hero to raise the house of Parma to its ancient fame! But we will talk of these matters over a glass of the ruby-coloured Capri Rosso. Be it remembered, signor," continued the young lord, as he led me through a suite of noble apartments, "that zealous as I am in the service of my country and its unhappy royal family, it is not without considerable dread that I draw off the *sbirri* from my territory, in the present state of Calabria. Divided by politics and old family grudges, our feudatories are all at enmity, and quarrels exist here among these wild mountains, which are altogether unknown to northern Italy. Up the valley of the Amato, some miles from this, there dwells a certain troublesome fool, Dionisio Barone, of Castel Guelfo; a rank Buonapartist. He is descended from that ancient family which, when but petty lords of Germany, in their wars with the Ghibellines, contrived to involve all the seignories, the cities, and families of Italy in feuds and bloodshed; and all 'for the sake of a vile cur!' as Giovanni Fiorentino tells us in his novel. Now, since the wars of Campanella, the rebel-friar, there has existed a bitter quarrel between the family of Alfieri and that of the Barone; who (as he has been making himself more than usually active and obnoxious of late) may, in my absence, overrun my territory with his followers and the banditti, and sack the villa. He is encouraged by the success of the French, whose general has abetted him in many an act of outrage and hostility."

We had now reached a splendid saloon, where a smooth floor of oak planks with the brightest polish amply compensated for the want of a comfortable carpet; indeed, this was not missed, while observing the richly-gilded furniture, the

superb frescoes on the ceiling, the graceful masses of rich drapery breaking the outline of lofty casement-windows, and the trophied arms, marble vases, and dark paintings by ancient masters, which adorned the walls. How all these gay things had escaped the French seemed a miracle.

A mandolin, with some leaves of music, a veil, a small kid glove, and a bouquet of roses, lying upon a side-table, announced that the villa was the residence of ladies; and my curiosity became strongly excited. I had heard much of the beauty of the Roman and Neapolitan women—of the rich lustre of their dark eyes, and their classic loveliness of face and form; I was anxious, therefore, to have the happiness of an introduction to the fair inhabitants of the villa. Such rapturous descriptions had been given of the charms of these Juno-like damsels, by officers who served with the Russians, under our general and Sir James Craig, at Naples, a short time before the Calabrese expedition was set on foot; that these, coupled with tender recollections of a certain adventure at Palermo, made me feel doubly interested in making acquaintance with the female branches of this noble family.

Giacomo Belloni (the man in the parti-coloured garments), who acted as butler and maggior-domo, or steward, superintended the arrangement of decanters, ices, grapes, and other refreshments; and by Santugo's invitation, I was about to seat myself at a table, when two ladies entered. The elder was a stately-looking gentildonna, about fifty years of age, robed in black satin. Her face, with its pale and blanched complexion, instead of exhibiting the ugliness so common in the elderly women of South Italy, wore traces of what perhaps had once been perfect loveliness; while her full dark eyes, and ebon hair, arranged in massive braids above a noble forehead, gave her, when viewed at a little distance, an aspect of statuesque beauty of form, though sadly faded by the dissipation of fashionable life; and I saw that she freely used both rouge and bella-donna. Luigi introduced me, and I learned she was the dowager viscontessa, his mother.

The younger lady was his cousin, Bianca d'Alfieri, who even at first appeared to me a strikingly beautiful girl; a captivating manner rendered the gentle expression of her features still more pleasing, as our acquaintance ripened. Her soft, bright, hazel eyes were shaded by lashes of the deepest jet, and her finely arched eyebrows were of the same sable hue. Glossy black tresses were braided like a coronet around her superb head, whence a mass of fine ringlets flowed over a neck and shoulders which would have been considered fair even in our own land of fair beauties, and in sunny Italy were.

deemed white as the new-fallen snow. The charms of her face and figure were rendered still more striking by the richness of her attire, and the splendid jewels which sparkled in her hair, on her bosom, and her delicate arms. Much has been said about the witchery of unadorned beauty; but the appearance of Bianca d'Alferi, arrayed in the splendour of full dress, and adorned with all that wealth and Italian taste could furnish to enhance her natural loveliness, was truly magnificent.

But how awkward was our greeting! The little I knew of her language had been picked up at the mess of Florestan's Italian guard at Palermo, and she knew not a word of English; so we could only maintain a broken conversation, while her cousin, the visconte, laughed, without ceremony, at my blunders. Our interview was stupid enough; and yet not without interest, for my delight was equal to my surprise on beholding in the young lady one with whom I had been acquainted at Palermo; indeed, I had been quite in love with her for a time, until the unlucky route arrived from headquarters, and she became almost forgotten when we changed our cantonments.

My readers will kindly indulge me while I relate a short reminiscence of my first introduction at the Sicilian capital; for, besides being of importance to my story, it affords an illustration of the peculiar manners of the time and country.

One night, at Queen Carolina's grand theatre, I observed, in the dress-circle, three young ladies, whose beauty made them the stars of the evening. Every glass, double and single barrelled, was levelled at them from boxes and pit, with the coolest impertinence. None present knew aught of them; save that they belonged to a Calabrese family of distinction, which had retired to Palermo on the advance of Joseph's army to Naples. The youngest (whom I had now the happiness of recognizing) seemed to me the most attractive; although, perhaps, less stately and dashing than her sisters Ortensia and Francesca; and truly she was one of those enchanting beings whom a man meets but once in a lifetime, or at least imagines so. I was in the next box to them, with some of Sir John's gay staff, when, inspired with admiration of their beauty, the whole house rose, *en masse*, on their retiring. I followed the three beauties to the portico, out of mere curiosity, to see what sort of a "turn-out" they had, and endeavoured to discover who they were. A handsome carriage, adorned with a coronet, stood at the steps to receive them. By the mismanagement of the driver and chasseur, it had run foul of the equipage of Castel Gualfo,

the Calabrian baron before mentioned; a volley of abuse was exchanged by the servants, who soon came to blows; knives were drawn, and the chasseur of each carriage unsheathed his hanger. With a lack of gallantry not usual on the continent, the proprietor of the other vehicle, a sour-visaged, withered little mortal, would not yield an inch. Terrified by the uproar, the kicking and plunging of horses, the swearing of servants, and the clamour of a gathering mob, the timid Italian girls stood trembling and irresolute on the steps of the illuminated portico. I advanced to make an offer of my services as an escort. They surveyed me for a moment, while their large dark eyes dilated with pleasure and thankfulness. I was a stranger, it was true; but my staff uniform and commission were sufficient introduction; the moment was critical, and my services were at once accepted.

I commanded the baron to wheel back his calesso; and did so with an air of determination and authority.

"Superba!" cried the little man, ironically; "who the devil are you?"

"That you will discover in the morning, my lord," I answered, sternly; "but, in the mean time, order your driver to rein back, or I will slash his cattle across the face."

"Not the thousandth part of an inch!" exclaimed the little man, from the depths of his carriage. "And hark you, Signor Carezziere, whip up your horses, and hold fast; on your life!"

"Monsignore Baróne, once more I request—"

"Fico! I am in waiting for the princess of Paterna, and is my carriage to give way before that of my bitterest enemy? Hear me, good people," he added, addressing the increasing mob, among whom I recognized many of the savage conciarotti—a tribe, or faction, which was long the terror of the citizens, and disgrace of Palermo—"hark ye, sirs! you all know me—Baróne Guelfo, of the vale of Amato—a true patriot, a despiser of Jacobins, and hater of Frenchmen. Is my carriage to make way for that of the visconte di Santugo, a follower of Ruffo, the Buonapartist—a traitor to his king, to Naples, and to Sicily—an upstart signorello of yesterday? I draw name and blood from the house of Guelfo, the foes of the Ghibellines, and one of the most ancient races of northern Italy."

"Beware what you assert, Signore Baróne!" said Zacheo, the old chasseur; Santugo, who is now fighting bravely in La Sylva, is the reverse of a traitor, and may yet make you eat your words with an ounce bullet."

"Hell contains not a blacker traitor!" cried the baron,

starting half out of his carriage, and animated by the bitterest personal hatred against his enemy. "No, nor Naples a more cunning Buonapartist. And sure I am that the bold-hearted *conciarotti* of Palermo will not see the Baróne Guelfo, one of the most faithful nobles of the Junta, and grand cup-bearer to his altezza the prince of Paterna, insulted in their streets, and his equipage compelled to yield before another."

"Largo! largo! viva il Baróne! largo! make way!" yelled the rabble.

I was excessively provoked at this obstinacy in the *cicisbéo* of the princess; it flowed from a political spirit, which I did not altogether understand. Meanwhile, the terror of the three Italian girls, and my anxiety for their safety, increased, as the clamouring *conciarotti* mustered apace, crowding around us.

The *conciarotti*! who has not heard of that terrible community, at whose name all Palermo trembled? Like the *lazzaroni* at Naples, and the *trasteverini* of Rome, a nest of matchless ruffians, banded together by mysterious laws, by ancient privileges and immunities, upon which not even the king or his viceroy dared to infringe; and against whom the power of the civil authorities and the bayonets of the soldiers, the edicts of the Junta and manifestoes from the viceroyal palace, were alike levelled fruitlessly and vainly. The enlightened viceroy, the marchese di Caraccioli, could smother the death-fires of the Inquisition, and demolish its dreaded office; but he dared not meddle with the tanners of Palermo.

The *conciarotti*, or leather-dressers, occupied the lowest and most filthy parts of the city. In every revolutionary commotion, riot, and brawl, they pre-eminently distinguished themselves by their murderous ferocity, and wanton outrages; and even during times of the most perfect peace, woe to the *sbirro*, or officer of the civil courts, who dared to show his face within their districts; which thus became a sanctuary for the robbers and assassins of all Sicily. These, from the date of their entrance, became enrolled among the *conciarotti* and to offend one member of this lawless community was sufficient to arouse the whole in arms. Many of the first noblesse in the kingdom were savagely massacred by the *conciarotti* during the riot of 1820; since when they have been, by the most vigorous efforts, rooted out, and their hideous den, so long a festering sore on the face of Palermo, utterly demolished.

Ripe at all times for wanton outrage, especially against the weak and unoffending, and animated by the prospect of plunder, a rabble of these black-browed artisans, armed with

ox-goads, knives, and clubs, threw themselves, with loud yells, upon the carriage which bore the arms of Sant'ago; they would have smashed it to pieces in a moment, had I not cut their leader down—an act which struck them with a panic—and, aided by Oliver Lascelles (a brother officer, who luckily came up at that moment), drove them back sword in hand. To hurry the ladies up the steps of the carriage, to close the door, and spring on the foot-board behind, was the work of a moment; and we drove off to Sant' Agata Palace, with all the rabble of Palermo yelling in our rear, like a pack of hungry hounds after a fruitless chase.

The splendid mansion of this Calabrese prince would probably have fallen a prey to the furious *conciarotti*, but for the timely arrival of the queen's Italian guard, and a detachment of ours, which were quartered in it for its protection.

Having thus, like a cavalier of romance, obtained a strong claim to the gratitude of the young ladies, next night, at a gay fête given by the prince of St. Agatha, I made all my approaches to these fair belles in due form; opened the trenches between the figures of a quadrille, came to closer quarters in the waltz, and kept up such a continual fire of little attentions and gallant nonsense, that, ere the ball closed, I congratulated myself on having made a favourable impression where I had some anxiety to please. I returned to my gloomy quarters in Fort la Galita, with my head buzzing from the effects of the prince's good wine and the myriad wax-lights which illuminated his saloons, to dream of Italian eyes and ankles, Sicilian gaiety, and the soft voice and softer smile of Bianca d'Alfieri, until aroused next morning by our drums beating the *générale* in the echoing squares of the fortress.

"Dundas, the route for Syracuse has come!" cried Lascelles, knocking lustily at my room door. "We march at daybreak to relieve the 81st. Deuced unpleasant, is it not?"

"Devil take the route!" thought I, as an appointment with Bianca to gallop along the Marina, and drive four-in-hand to Montreale, flashed upon my mind. But there was no help for it. The 62nd bade adieu to "Palermo the Happy," and amid the severe duties of Syracuse, I perhaps ceased for a time to think of Bianca. But to resume.

"Ah, signora!" said I, taking her hand, "you have not quite forgotten me, then?"

"Oh, Signor Claude, how can I forget that terrible night with the *conciarotti*?"

"And the ball at the prince's palace?"

A slight blush suffused her soft cheek, and I felt my old

penchant returning with renewed strength. "Good!" I thought; "she has not forgotten *my name*." On inquiring for her sisters, Ortensia and Francesca, whose black eyes had so bewitched poor Oliver Lascelles, the young lady changed colour, as if one part of my inquiry distressed her, and the visconte appeared a little disconcerted. I had made an unlucky blunder, yet knew not how.

"Ortensia is married to the Cavaliere Benedetto del Castagno," replied Bianca; "and dear Francesca has taken the veil, and resides in her convent at Crotona."

The visconte interrupted any further questioning, by warmly thanking me for the attention I had shown to his cousins in saving them from the insults of the Sicilian rabble. A very long and common-place conversation then ensued, about the probable issue of our expedition, politics, and the fashionable gossip of Palermo; until the subject was changed by the entrance of Giacomo Belloni, to announce that the carriage was in readiness. The viscontessa rose, and began to apologize for having to leave me; but as it was a playing night at Casa Sant' Agata at Nicastro, the prince would be indignant if she were absent.

"Bianca and I are constant visitors at the prince's conversazioni; and as all the *élite* of the Lower Province are invited in honour of your army landing, it is so impossible to absent one self, that you must indeed excuse us. Visconte, you will, of course, remain?"

"Impossible!" replied Luigi; "I am bound in honour to visit the prince's tables to-night, and to give Casteltermo, the Miltese commander, a chance of regaining the thousand ducats I won from him—ay, per Baccho! and lost immediately afterwards to that cursed hunchback, Gaspare Truffi. Signor, I am puzzled! To stay away would offend my powerful friend, the prince; and yet, to go, even should you accompany us, may seem lacking in politeness——"

"I have already received an invitation, my lord," said I; "a chasseur of the prince's household arrived at the camp, just before I left, with cards for the general and staff-officers."

"Benissimo! excellent! Then you go, of course?"

I bowed and assented. Knowing how deeply the desperate passion of gaming was rooted in the hearts of the Neapolitans, I expected to behold something altogether new—card-playing on a grand scale; and desiring my valise to be unstrapped from the saddle of Cartouche, I retired to make a hurried toilet for the prince's conversazione.

CHAPTER IV.

DOUBLE OR QUIT!

THE ladies soon appeared attired for the carriage; each closely shawled, with her elaborately-dressed hair covered by an ample riding-hood of black satin. The evening had now turned to night, and four servants bearing links lighted us to the portico; where stood the well-hung and dashing carriage of the visconte, whose footmen were clad in a livery so gay, that my uniform was almost cast in the shade by the comparison.

The vehicle being light, and the horses swift and strong, we dashed at a tremendous rate over a road so rough and stony that all attempts at conversation were rendered futile by the jolting and noise; I never endured such a shaking, save once, when I had the pleasure of being conveyed, severely wounded, from Cefalu to Palermo, on a sixteen-pounder gun. All the Neapolitans, I believe, are addicted to furious driving. As the carriage swayed from side to side, I expected, at every lurch, that the whole party would be upset, and scattered on the road. However, no such mishap occurred, and in a very short time, with the gay *chasseur* galloping in front, we were flying through the paved streets of Nicastro—a large and well-built city, on the frontiers of the Upper Province.

High hills, covered with thick foliage, and watered by innumerable cascades, arise on every side of Nicastro; while towering above its houses and ample convents, stands the black, embattled keep of the ancient castle, within the strong chambers of which, Enrico, prince of Naples, paid the penalty of his rebellion, by a long and dreary captivity.

We drove through a lofty archway, and drew up in the crowded quadrangle of a brilliantly-illuminated palace; from the windows of which the light streamed down on densely-packed carriages, horses richly caparisoned, gilded hammer-cloths, and the glancing plumes and liveries of footmen, drivers, and *chasseurs*, or outriders. The palace was situated immediately opposite the shrine of poor Sancto Gennaro—whom we involved in total darkness, by extinguishing all his consecrated tapers as we swept through the *Strada Ruffo*.

On alighting, I was about to give my arm to the viscontessa, but happily her son anticipated me, and I had the more agreeable office of ushering his fair cousin up the splendid staircase of the mansion: which displayed on every hand the

usual profusion of vases and Italian statuary, coloured lamps gilding, and frescoes.

"It is, then, a conversazione?" I observed to Bianca.

"Yes, signor; but you will find little conversing here," she replied, smiling in such a way as to reveal a row of brilliant little teeth. "Ah! 'tis a horrible den!" she added, with a sigh. "You are a stranger among us, and will surely become a victim. Oh, caro signor! let me implore you not to play, whatever my cousin the visconte may say to induce you, as you will surely be stripped of every ducat; and above all, do not quarrel with any one, or you will as certainly be—killed!"

"Pleasant!" said I, surprised at her advice, and the earnestness with which it was given. "But I trust, cara signora, that my Scottish caution will protect me from the first danger; while a keen blade and a stout arm may be my guard against the second."

"Alas!" she sighed, "your sabre will little avail you in an encounter with the stiletto of a revengeful Calabrian. Said you, signor, that you came from la Scozia—the land of Ossian and Fingal?"

I looked upon her animated face with surprise and inquiry.

"Ah! why so astonished? I have read the Abate Melchior Cesarotti, with whose translation all Italy is enraptured. But, Signor Claude," she added gaily, remember my caution; "you are under my guidance to-night."

I pressed the hand of the amiable girl, and assured her that I would abide entirely by her advice. I could not sufficiently admire that innate goodness of heart which made her so interested in the welfare and safety of a comparative stranger.

The noble staircase, the illuminated corridors, and magnificent saloons of the palace, were crowded with all the rich, the gay, and the luxurious of Nicastro and the villas scattered along the coast, and fresh arrivals were incessantly alighting from vehicles of every description,—the lumbering and gorgeous old-fashioned chariot, the clattering calesso, and the humble jog-trot sedan. Some guests came on horseback; but none who could avoid it came on foot,—to use his legs on such an occasion would be considered a blot on the escutcheon of a Neapolitan gentleman, who, if he has the least pretension to dignity, deems some sort of vehicle an indispensable appendage. But the French had appropriated a vast number of horses for baggage and other purposes; and those cavaliers who had lost their equipages were fain to steal in unseen among the press, or remain at home,—forfeiting the rich harvest which the open halls and ample tables of the prince of

Sant' Agata promised to every needy gentleman, sharp-witted dowager, and desperate rogue.

"Truly," thought I, while surveying the gay assemblage, "the land is not so desolate as we have been led to imagine!" But probably so dazzling a concourse would not have met but for the presence of our army, which now lay between them and their hated enemies.

In a spacious saloon, ornamented with statues and paintings, where the lights of the girandoles were flashed back from gilded pendants and shining columns, and sparkled in bright gems and brighter eyes, stood the prince, receiving the stream of company glittering with epaulettes, orders, stars, and jewellery, which poured in through the folding-doors. He was a withered little man, whom I had often seen at Palermo. Like too many who were present, he was said to have succumbed to General Regnier; but now, encouraged by our presence, he had hoisted the flag of the Bourbons on his palace, and donned the green uniform of the Sicilian Scaup-petteria, or fusiliers of the guard, while the star of St. Mark the Glorious sparkled on his breast.

None of our staff had yet arrived; and the Signora Bianca presented me formally to her relation the prince, who inquired, with an affectation of interest, about the health of the general—the number of our forces—what news of the enemy; but I saw him no more that night. Moving onward with the throng, we found ourselves passing through the opposite folding-doors, opening into another room of the suite, which was the grand scene of operations. Here the tables for *faro* and *rouge-et-noir* were already glittering with ducats, piastres, and yellow English guineas, mingled with Papal scudi and Venetian sequins. Seats were seized, and places occupied, with the utmost eagerness; but I had not made up my mind whether to play or not. Standing behind Bianca's chair, and leaning over the back of it, I was much more occupied with her snowy shoulders, her uplifted eyes, and parted rosy lips, when she turned towards me, than with the company, of whom she gave me an account. To my surprise, she included in her enumeration one or two very jaunty cavaliers, who were supposed to be leaders of banditti,—or, to speak more gently, free companions,—who had been raised to the rank of patriotic soldiers by turning their knives and rifles against the French, and co-operating with the chiefs of the Masse.

I confessed that I did not feel quite at home in such mixed society; but Bianca only smiled at my scruples, shrugged her fair shoulders, and made no reply.

A soft symphony, which at that moment floated from the

music-gallery through the lofty apartments, preluded the famous waltz of Carolina, and announced that a few of the younger visitors preferred the more polite and graceful amusement of the dance to rattling dice and insipid cards.

"Deuced hot here, is it not?" said Lascelles, my brother aide-de-camp, as he passed me, adroitly handing a very pretty girl through the press round the tables. "The dancers are beginning: for the honour of the corps, you must join us, or some of those fellows of the 81st may march away with your fair companion." He moved away, with a knowing wink.

"'Tis the little Signora Giamondo,—very pretty, is she not?" said Bianca. The girl might have been termed supremely beautiful; and not more so than unfortunate: but of that more anon. She waved her hand invitingly to Bianca, and with her long satin train swept through the folding-doors. Fearful of being anticipated by some of our staff, whom I saw in close confab' with Santugo, I solicited the hand of his fair cousin for the first waltz.

She glanced inquiringly at her aunt, who, smiling, bowed an assent, as she swept a pile of ducats towards her. I drew the white-gloved hand of Bianca across my arm; and in a moment more we were whirling in the giddy circle of the waltzers.

With so fair a partner, and a heart buoyant with youth, vivacity, and love, how joyously one winds through the mazes of that voluptuous dance which is peculiarly the national measure of Italy. Never shall I forget the happiness of that "hour of joy,"—the time when Bianca raised her soft, hazel eyes to mine, as if imploring the additional support which my arm so readily yielded,—the beaming smile and hurried whisper,—the half caress, with soft curls fanning your cheek, the flushing face and flashing eye,—oh, the giddy, joyous waltz! It has a charm which will abide outlive prudish censure and pungent satire,—even that of the witty Lance Langstaff. I mentally bequeathed Santugo to the great master of mischief, when he dragged us back to the gambling saloon.

After a scanty allowance of ices, wine, and fruit had been handed round, or scrambled for at the side-tables, the most important business of the evening commenced in earnest. Then came the tug of war! Hundreds of eager eyes, some of them bright and bewitching, were greedily gloating on the shifting heaps, which glittered on the tables of the prince's hall: for, by thus disgracing his palace, his altezza cleared an annual income of twelve thousand ducats. The closeness of the evening, combined with the pressure of the crowd at the tables, soon rendered the atmosphere of the saloon quite op-

pressive ; the faces of the ladies became flushed, and the iced malvasia was most acceptable and delicious.

The general and staff had by this time arrived, and I soon became aware that we were the lions of the evening ; our scarlet uniforms and silver epaulettes attracted universal observation. My fair Italian was sensible of this, and seemed proud to have me as her cavalier : her eyes sparkled with animation, and her vivacity increased ; while her little heart bounded with delight at this momentary triumph over sundry disappointed cavalieri and female rivals. Vanity apart, a rich foreign uniform on a tolerably good figure has a great attraction for female eyes. But counts and countesses, cavaliers and signoras, even dark-robed ecclesiastics (for there was a sprinkling of them), soon became completely absorbed in the affairs of the table,—for gambling is the ruling passion on the continent.

“ They neither have nor want any other amusement than this last,” says Kotzebue, writing of the Neapolitans. “ The states of Europe are overthrown ; they game not the less. Pompeii comes forth from its grave ; they game still. Vesuvius vomits forth flames ; yet the splendid gaming-table is not left. The ruins of Pæstum, a few miles distant, shining as it were before every eye, must be discovered by strangers ; for the Neapolitans are gaming. The greatest dukes and princes are keepers of gambling-tables.” As it was in the capital, so was it in all the provinces.

Most of the ladies were attended by cavaliers ; some of the married, by that indescribable contingent on Italian matrimony (which we must hope is disappearing)—a *cicisbèò*. A courtly old gentleman, who had attended the viscontessa during her married life, now sat beside her, sorting her cards, handing ices, and smiling as sweetly as if she were still a belle ; he was the Signor Battista Gismondo, a major of the loyal Masse. On the other side sat Bianca, watching the various turns of the game ; although, for a time, she refused to take a part in it herself.

We were seated at the faro-table, the acting banker of which was the duke of Bagnara, a professed gamester, and friend of the prince ; as also were the croupiers, il Cavaliere Benedetto del Castagno, and Castalermo, a knight of Malta, with whom I had been on terms of intimacy at Palermo. The latter was bailiff, or commander, of St. Eufemio : but, alas ! in the wars of Buonaparte, the commanderie had been scattered, and the preceptory house reduced to ruins. He was a tall, swarthy, broad-chested, and noble-looking fellow, and still wore the habit of his order : a scarlet uniform,

lapelled and faced with black velvet, and laced with gold, having epaulettes of the same, with an eight-pointed cross of silver on each; a large silver cross of eight points figured on the breast, and an embroidered belt sustained a long cross-hilted sword. Coal-black mustachios, protruding fiercely from his upper lip, completed his soldierlike aspect. One of the last knights of his order, he was, perhaps, also the last of his proud and distinguished race; and he certainly looked a thorough Italian cavalier of the old school.

Before the banker lay heaps of coin, to which the gamblers continually directed their greedy eyes, flashing alternately with rage, exultation, or envy, as the piles of gold and silver changed owners, and were swept hurriedly into bags and purses by the long bony fingers of sharp-eyed priests, and sharper old ladies; who were too often winners to be pleasant company at the tables generally. Although the duke was the nominal holder of the bank, Santugo (who had lost considerably, and was, therefore, out of humour) informed me that the prince had the principal share in it, and that the profits were divided between them, when the company separated. I could not but feel the greatest disgust at the place, and contempt for the majority of the company; where women of rank and beauty degraded themselves by mixing with high-born blacklegs and professed gamblers, whose tricks and expressions were worthy of the meanest "hell" in London or Paris.

One hideous fellow, in particular, attracted my attention. He was a dwarf, and bulky in figure, but scarcely four feet in height, and miserably deformed: his head and arms would have suited a strong man of six feet high; but the head was half buried between his brawny shoulders and a prodigious hump, which rose upon his back, and his arms reached far below his bandy knees. He had the aspect as well as the proportions of a baboon; for masses of black and matted locks hung round his knobby and unshapely cranium, while a bushy beard of wiry black hair, and thick, dirty mustachios, with fierce eyes twinkling restlessly on each side of an enormous nose, made up a visage of satyr-like character. His person contrasted strangely with the garb he wore, which was the serge robe of San. Pietro di Pisa: a brotherhood suppressed in 1809 by a decree of Murat, king of Naples.

This monster was the most successful player present: he eyed the cards in the hand of others more keenly than his own suite; and I soon became convinced that he knew the backs as well as the fronts of them: yet the cards were perfectly new. He was opposed to the viscontessa, and notwith-

standing her skill, acquired by the nightly gambings of five-and-thirty years, he stripped her of a thousand ducats; every bet he made being successful: his long ungainly arms and large brown hands found continual occupation in sweeping the money into a vast pouch which hung at his knotted girdle; and he always accompanied the act with such a provoking grin of malignant exultation, that I felt inclined to box his ears.

Bianca d'Alfieri blushed and trembled with shame and sorrow, on beholding the defeat and bitter mortification of her aunt; who sat like a statue of despair, when her last ducat vanished into the capacious bag of the hideous, little religioso: but her misery was unheeded by those around, and even by her son, whose angry gestures and flashing eyes led me to suppose that he was encountering an equal run of bad fortune at the rouge-et-noir table. He had acted all night as a sort of assistant to the banker, whom he often rendered uneasy by the enormous stakes he answered.

"Bravone! sharper! oh, villain hunchback!" exclaimed the old lady, kindling with uncontrollable fury at the loss of her gold; "I will punish thee yet! My jewels are still left, and demon though thou art in face and figure, never shalt thou conquer Giulia d'Alfieri."

She unclasped a tiara of brilliants from her head, removed a costly necklace from her bosom, and with trembling haste drew off her rings and bracelets, which she cast on the table as a stake. The banker and the knight of Malta attempted to interpose; but the hunchback had already accepted the challenge with a fiendish grin of delight, promising to answer the stake on his own responsibility.

"Madonna mia! my dearest aunt, beware!" urged the plaintive voice of Bianca: but the viscontessa heard her not. With straining eyes she watched the fatal cards, which once more were told out slowly and deliberately; while every eye was fixed, and every lip compressed, as if the fate of Europe lay on the turning up of these "bits of painted pasteboard."

The viscontessa lost! Clapping her hands, she looked wildly round her for a moment; Gismondo, her venerable cicerone, presented his arm, and led her from the table in an agony of chagrin. Bianca unconsciously laid her hand on mine, and sighed deeply.

"I am a sharper and bully, am I, illustrissima?" chuckled the hunchbacked rogue, as he swept the glittering jewels into his pouch, and chuckled, wheezed, grinned, and snapped his fingers, like an animated punchinello.

"Bravo! bravissimo! The signora called me ass, too, I think! A hard name to use in this illustrious company. Ho, ho! there are few asses so richly laden, and fewer bullies whose bags are so well filled."

"Silence, fellow!" cried Castelfermo, sternly; "silence, and begone!"

"Instantly," replied the other, with a dark look; "but keep me in remembrance, signor. I am Gaspare Truffi—thou knowest me: all on this side of Naples know me; and some on the other side, too." Here his eyes encountered mine, which I had unconsciously fixed upon him, with an angry frown of astonishment and contempt.

"Ho, ho! Signor Subalterno," said he, not daunted in the least; "spare your frowns for those whom they are calculated to frighten. I have not seen you playing to-night—will you try your hand with me? But, no; you dare not: you are afraid to risk a paltry bajocco!"

"Signor Canonico!" I replied, sternly, "beware how you venture to insult or taunt me. Recollect, rascal, that neither the presence upon which you have intruded yourself, nor your black robe, may be a protection against a horse-whip, should I be provoked so far as to use one on that unshapely figure of yours."

"Corpo di Christo!" cried he, while his eyes glared with avarice and fury; "will you answer my stake, Signor Claude?"

"Undoubtedly: but was it the devil told you my name?"

"You have guessed it, my good friend,—Satan himself," he answered, with a grin; and flung his great heavy passe upon the table.

"A thousand ducats on the black lozenge," said I.

"Double or quit!" he rejoined, and I bowed an assent, though I had not above twenty ducats in my purse. But enraged at his insolent arrogance in the presence of so many, I was determined to go on, neck or nothing, and punish him, or myself, for engaging in a contest so contemptible. He staked his money; which it was agreed by the banker and croupiers must be entirely at his own risk, and independent of them. I staked my word, which was of course deemed sufficient. The cards were dealt with a precision which gave me full time to repent (when too late) of the desperate affair in which I had become involved with a regular Italian sharper. I dreaded the disgrace of incurring a debt of honour, which could not be conveniently discharged: for I had no means of raising the money, save by bills on England.

There was also to be feared the displeasure of the general; who, like all my countrymen, was steadfastly opposed to gambling, and strictly enforced those parts of the "Articles of War" referring to that fashionable mode of getting rid of one's money. Agitated by these disagreeable thoughts, I knew not how the game went: the room seemed to swim around me; and I was first aroused to consciousness by Bianca's soft arm pressing mine, and by a rapturous burst of exultation from the company, who had crowded, in breathless expectation, around the table.

I had won!

Gaspare Truffi uttered a furious imprecation, and tossing out of his bloated bag a thousand and ten ducats, together with all the jewels he had so recently won, the discomfited dwarf rushed from the table, with a yell like that of a wounded lynx. I now rose greatly in the estimation of the right Honourable company; they crowded round me with congratulations for my victory over the hunchbacked priest, whom they seemed equally to dread and despise.

The jewels and gold I secured in my breast pocket, lest some nimble hand in the crowd might save me the trouble. It was by this time long past midnight, and Luigi, who had borne an unusual run of ill-luck not very philosophically, proposed that we should retire. He had lost a large sum of money to the baron di Bivona, and they parted in high displeasure, with mutual threats and promises of meeting again.

We were soon in the carriage, and leaving Nicastro behind us at the rate of twelve miles an hour. When passing through the porch of the palace, I caught sight of a strange crouching figure, looking like a black bundle under the shadow of a column. A deep groan, as the carriage swept past, announced that it was the hunchback, whom I had perhaps reduced to penury. For a moment the contest and the victory were repented; but a few hours afterwards proved to me that he was unworthy of commiseration.

CHAPTER V.

GASPARE TRUFFI, THE HUNCHBACK.

"BEWARE! Signor Claude," said the visconte, as we drove homewards; "you have now made a most deadly enemy in Calabria. Do you know whom you have defeated?"

"An itinerant priest, probably," I answered, with a slight tone of pique.

'A priest, certainly; but, thank heaven! we have few such, either in Naples or Sicily. Though expelled from the brotherhood of San Baldassare, in Friuli, for some irregularities (which, in the days of the late inquisitor, Turloni, could only have been cleansed by fire), Gaspare Truffi still wears the garb of a religious order—generally that of St. Peter of Pisa—that he may the more easily impose upon the peasantry; who stand in no little awe of his harsh voice, misshapen figure, and hideous visage. On the mountains I have seen him in a very different garb; with a poniard in his sash, and the brigand's long rifle slung across his back. He is said to be in league with the banditti in the wilderness; and, as the confessor of Francatripa, he has obtained considerable sway over them. On more than one occasion, in the encounters between the brigands and the French, he has given undisputable proofs of valour, though clouded by fearful cruelty. You have heard of the wilderness of La Sylva? There the mountains rise in vast ridges abruptly from the sea, shooting upward, peak above peak, their sides clothed with gloomy and impenetrable wood, or jagged with masses of volcanic rock, which overhang and threaten the little villages that nestle in the valleys below. Tremendous cascades and perpendicular torrents—broad sheets of water fringed with snow-white foam—leap from cliff to cliff, and, thundering down echoing chasms, seek their way, through mountain gorges, to the ocean. Into one of the frightful valleys of that secluded district, a body of French troops, commanded by the marchese di Monteleone, were artfully drawn by Francatripa, the brigand chief, Gaspare, his lieutenant and confessor, and all their horde, by whom the whole unhappy battalion, to the number of five hundred rank and file, were utterly exterminated. Thick as hail the rifle-balls showered down from all sides, and ponderous masses of rock, dislodged by crow-bars, were hurled from the cliffs along the line of march of that doomed regiment. Save the marchese and his aide, every man perished; and the place is yet strewn with their bones for miles—a ghastly array of skeletons, scarce hidden amid the weeds and long rank grass, and bleaching in the sun as the wolves and vultures left them."

"Cruel! horrible!" said Bianca, clasping her hands.

"Benissimo!" continued my enthusiastic friend; "it was a just retribution for those whom they slaughtered hourly in their Golgotha at Monteleone. It was a striking example of Calabrian courage and Italian vengeance! It will be recorded in history, like the terrible 'Sicilian Vespers.'"

"A pretty picture of society!" I observed: "and such

wretches as that apostate priest are permitted to attend the entertainments of the prince of St. Agatha?"

"You must not criticise us too severely," replied Luigi. "The truth is, we all perceive that Fra Truffi is not an apostle; but he is the lieutenant and confessor of Franchipa, who is esteemed the greatest patriot in the province, and with whom it is not the prince's interest to quarrel, in the present disorganized state of society. Besides, he has plenty of ducats to spend, and he plays freely and fearlessly; which is the principal, and indeed essential qualification to insure respect and admittance to the first gambling-tables in the land. Per Baccho! here is the villa—we have arrived at last!" he exclaimed, as the carriage drew up before the dark facade of his ancestral mansion.

Before the viscontessa retired, I presented her with her ducats and jewels which I had won back from the hunchback; but she would by no means accept of them, and seemed for a moment to be almost incensed at my offer. I apologized, and returned the ducats to my purse; they proved a very seasonable reinforcement to my exchequer, which racing, gambling, and our four-in-hand club at Palermo, had considerably drained. But the jewels I absolutely refused to retain; and a polite contest ensued, which ended by Luigi proposing that Bianca should present them to her patron, St. Eufemia, whose famous shrine stood in the church of the Sylvestrians at Nicastro.

Although aware that by this arrangement these splendid trinkets would become the prey of the greedy priesthood, I could not offer a remonstrance against such a proposition, and only requested permission to present Bianca with the necklace. I beheld with secret joy the beautiful girl blushing and trembling with pleasure; she did not venture, however, to raise her full, bright eyes to mine, as I clasped the string of lustrous gems around her "adorable neck."

"A holy night to you, Signor Claude," said her aunt, as they rose to retire; "we shall not, perhaps, see you when you leave the villa, with my son and his people, for the British camp. But O, caro signor," she added, pressing my hand affectionately, "we wish you and your companions all safety and success in fighting against the enemies of our king; on bended knees, before the blessed patron of Alfieri, with my whole household and myself implore it. And remember, whenever you have spare time in the intervals of your military duty, the inmates of the villa d'Alfieri will ever be most happy to welcome you."

She retired, leaning on the arm of Bianca, who merely

sowed as she withdrew. The expressive glance I cast after her retiring figure did not escape the quick-sighted visconte, who gave me a peculiar—shall I say haughty?—smile, which brought the blood to my cheek; my heart misgave me, that in time coming I might find him a formidable rival. Young, handsome, rich, and titled, and enjoying all the privileges which relationship gave him, he was indeed to be dreaded by a poor sub of the line.

"Giacomo!" cried he to his follower, "draw back the curtains, and open the windows towards the sea. *Cospetto!* the air of these rooms is like the *sciorecco*—the malaria of the marshes—or the breath of the very devil! Bring champagne, and lay dice and cards—no, by heaven! I have had enough of them to-night. Bring us the roll of our volunteers, and then begone to your nest, for Signor Claude and I intend to finish the morning jovially. And, oh! Giacomo, see that all our fellows are up with the lark, mustered in the quadrangle, and at Lieutenant Dundas's disposal, by day-break."

The lofty casements were thrown open, revealing the midnight ocean, in which the stars were reflected, together with streaks of lurid light thrown across the deep blue sky by the beacon-fires of the armed parties along the coast. The murmuring sea dashed its waves into foam beneath the arched galleries and overhanging rocks, and the cool breeze, which swept over its rippled surface, being wafted into the saloon, was delightfully refreshing. The wax-lights were trimmed, silver jars and tall Venetian glasses placed on the table; and the bright wine, sparkling through the carved crystal of the massive caraffa, and embossed salvers piled with glowing grapes and luscious peaches, made me feel very much inclined to bring in daylight gloriously. I wished that my friend Lascelles and some of our gay staff at Palermo, or the right good fellows of my regimental mess, had been present.

"Your health, signor," said the visconte, when Giacomo had filled our glasses and retired. "May you become a *marescial di campo* ere you turn your horse's tail on Italy!"

"I thank you, my lord," said I, smiling; "but I shall be very happy if I gain but stars to my epaulettes; and yet, ere that, Massena must be conquered and Rome won!"

"Now, then," he resumed, laying before me a long muster-roll of Italian names, "here are five hundred brave Calabrians, most of them my own immediate dependants, whom I have authority to raise in arms; but who, without the exertion of that authority, are able and willing to serve Ferdinand of Naples;

whom Madonna long preserve ! although the said Ferdinand is a fool. But unless your general appoints me their leader, and permits me to nominate my own officers, these fellows may desert *en masse* to the mountains, for they are unused to the rule of foreigners."

"Our general is too well aware of the courtesy requisite on his landing on these shores, to dispute with the Italian nobles, or chiefs of the *Masse*, their right to command their own followers. If they will serve obediently and fight well—obeying as good soldiers must obey, enduring as they must endure—Sir John Stuart will require nothing more." My enthusiastic friend grasped my hand.

"In our first pitched battle with the enemy," he exclaimed, "place us in front of the line, and we will show il Cavalière Giovanni Stuardo, that the bold mountaineers of the Apennines are not less hardy or courageous than their ancestors were when Rome was in the zenith of its glory."

Puzzled for a moment to recognize the familiar name of the general through the pronunciation of the visconte, I was deliberating how to reply, when I observed the great gnome-like visage of the hunchback appear at one of the open windows ; his fierce, twinkling eyes sternly fixed on mine, with the steady, glistening gaze of a snake. He levelled a pistol, but it flashed in the pan. My first impulse was to grasp my sabre, my second to spring through the casement, which opened down to the level of the tessellated floor.

"What see you, signor ?" exclaimed my astonished host.

"That abominable hunchback, Peter of Pisa, Friar Truffle, or whatever you call him."

"Impossible !" said the visconte. "Most improbable, indeed ! at such an hour of the morning, and in a place where the cliffs descend sheer downwards to the sea !"

"Monsignore, on my honour, I saw his ill-omened visage peering between the rose-bushes."

Luigi snatched a sword from the wall, and we made tremendous havoc among the full-blown roses, searching so far as we dared to venture along the beetling rocks ; but no trace of the eaves-dropper could be discovered. Indeed, the dangerous nature of the place, when I surveyed it, led me to suppose that I *might* have been mistaken, and that the apparition was an illusion of a heated imagination ; for my head was now beginning to swim with the effects of the champagne. Santugo, however, took the precaution of holting the casements, and drawing the curtains ; after which we stretched ourselves once more on the couches, to listen for any sound that announced the approach of an intruder.

"Ha! what is that?" exclaimed Santugo abruptly, as a dropping or pattering sound was heard on the floor.

"The deuce! my wound bleeds!" said I, on finding that the slight sword-thrust which I had received in the morn had broken out afresh; probably in consequence of exertions when searching for the hunchback.

"A wound!" rejoined Santugo, with astonishment; "knew not that you had been hurt this morning in your skirmish with the voltigeurs."

"A mere scratch, visconte," I replied with a jaunty carelessness, half-affected, as I unbuttoned my uniform coat, and found with surprise that the sleeve and white kerseymere vest were completely saturated with blood. Through my neglect, and the heat of the climate, the wound was becoming more painful than I could have expected so slight a thrust to be.

"Sancto Januario! you never said a word of all this!" cried Luigi, alarmed by seeing so much blood. "Olà, there!" he added, springing to the door. "Giacomo Salvatoré! Andronicus! you Greek vagabond!"

In three minutes we had all the male portion of the household about us, with faces of alarm, in motley garbs and variously armed.

Giacomo, who had gained some knowledge as a leech during his innumerable skirmishes with the French, bathed the wound and bound up my arm in a very scientific manner; after which I bade my host adieu, and requested to be shown to my apartment. In truth, it was time to be napping, when in three hours afterwards we should be on the march for Maida.

My sleeping-room was in a part of the villa which had formed a tower of the ancient castle; and, if there were any ghosts in merry Naples, it was just the place where one would have taken up its quarters. It was named the *wolf's chamber*; the legend thereof the reader will learn towards the close of my narrative. A large black stain on the dark oaken planks of the floor yet remained, in testimony of some deed of blood perpetrated in the days of Campanella; when a fierce civil war was waged in Southern Italy.

That I had seen the face of the hunchback palpably and distinctly, I had little doubt, when recalling the whole affair to mind; and I had none whatever that the hideous little man had great reason to be my enemy. At that unhappy gaming-table, I had stripped him, perhaps, of every coin he possessed, as well as the rich jewels he had won: a double triumph, which, coupled with my sarcasm on his appearance, was quite enough to whet his vengeance against me. In truth,

it was impossible to feel perfectly at ease while reflecting that he might still be lurking about the villa ; ay, perhaps under my very bed.

More than once, when about to drop asleep, the sullen dash of the waves in the arcades below the sea-terrace aroused me to watchfulness ; and I started, half imagining that the bronze figures on the ebony cabinet, or the beld forms in a large dark painting by Annibale Carracci, were instinct with life.

Presently, I saw a shadow pass across the muslin curtains of my bed, and a figure gliding softly between me and the night-lamp, which burned on a carved bracket upheld by a beautiful statue of a virgin bearing sacred fire. The sight aroused me in an instant ; recalled my senses, quickened every pulse, and strung every nerve for action. Remaining breathlessly still, until my right hand had got a firm grasp of my sabre (which luckily lay on the other side of the couch), I dashed aside the curtains and sprang out of bed, just in time to elude the furious stroke of a Bastia knife ; which, had it taken effect on my person, instead of the down pillows, would have brought my Calabrian campaign to a premature and most unpleasant close.

It was Truffi, the hunchback ! Exasperated by this second attempt upon my life, I rushed upon him. He made a bound towards the window, through which he had so stealthily entered by unfastening the Venetian blind ; but at the moment he was scrambling out, my sword descended sheer on his enormous hump. Uttering a howl of rage and anguish, he fell to the ground, where he was immediately seized in the powerful grasp of Giacomo Belloni.

"Signor Teniente !" cried Giacomo, as they struggled together on the very edge of the cliff, " cleave his head while I hold him fast ! The stunted Hercules—the cursed croak-back ! Maladetto ! he has the strength of his father, the devil ! Quick, signor ! smite him under the ribs, or he will throw me into the sea ! " But before I could arrive to his assistance, the hunchback himself had fallen, or been tossed (Giacomo said the latter) from the balustrade terrace, which overhung the water. He sank in the very spot where Belloni informed me there was a whirlpool, which a hundred years before had sucked down the *San Giovanni*, a galley of the Maltese knights. Escape seemed impossible, and I expected to be troubled with him no more.

"You may sleep safely now, signor," said the panting victor ; " he will never annoy you again in this world. The Signora Bianca was afraid that the hunchback might make some attempt upon your chamber (where, to speak

truth, blood has been spilt more than once), and so she ordered me to watch below the window with my rifle; but overcome with wine and the heat of the air, I dropped asleep, and was only awakened by his ugly carcass coming squash upon mine!"

"I am deeply grateful to the Signora Bianca for her anxiety and attention. But, Master Giacomo, you must learn to watch with your eyes open, after we take the field to-morrow—nodding on sentry will not do among us."

Giacomo was abashed, and withdrew. Thus closed the ventures of my first day in Lower Calabria.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CALABRIAN FREE CORPS.

AWAKENED at daybreak by the report of the morning gun from the admiral's ship in the bay, I leaped out of bed, and threw open the casement to enjoy the pure, cool breeze from the sea; for my blood felt hot and feverish,—the effects of the wine I had taken during the past evening, and the exciting occurrences of the last few hours. My wounded arm, too, was stiff and painful; but I hoped it would soon cease to give me any inconvenience.

Another bright and cloudless Italian morning; the distant sea and the whole sky, so far as the eye could reach, were all of that pure azure tint which the most pellucid atmosphere alone can produce. The sun had not yet risen, but the east was bright with the dawn, which burnished the rippling surface of the ocean, whose wavelets gleamed alternately with green and gold, as they broke on the shining shore. The morning landscape presented the most vivid contrasts of dazzling light and deep shadow. The peaks of the hills above Maida,—those hills which were so soon to echo the boom of our artillery—the wavy woods which clothed their sides, and the silver current of the reedy Amato, glittered with glowing light; while the bosky vale through which the river wound, and the town of St. Eufemio, were steeped in comparative gloom. The bayonets of the marines on board Sir Sydney's squadron were gleaming on poop and fore-castle; and the red top-light, which burned like a lurid spark, amid the well-squared yards, and taut black rigging of the flag-ship, cast a long and tremulous ray across the still bosom of the brightening sea. It vanished when the morning gun flashed forth from the dark port-hole; and, the shrill notes of the boat-

swains' whistles piping up the hands, when the whole fleet began to heave short on their anchors.

Dressing with expedition, in ten minutes I stood booted and belted in front of the villa, where Santugo and two other cavaliers mustered their recruits. Their appearance, though rather wild, was both romantic and picturesque; they numbered five hundred men; young, athletic, and handsome in person, swarthy in visage, and soldier-like in bearing—the *setting-up* a little excepted; altogether, they were a very valuable acquisition to our army. Their weapons were of a very miscellaneous and unwarlike character; consisting of clubs, poniards, and the formidable Italian ox-goads which glittered in the sun like lances, with some very indifferent rifles. But I promised the visconte a sufficient supply of arms, accoutrements, and clothing, when his people were formally arrayed under our standard.

I was welcomed by a shout; and the cavaliers Benedetto del Castagno and Marco di Castelermo, received me with the utmost politeness and warmth of manner. Both these gentlemen were of noble families, and enjoyed a high reputation for courage. The first was a merry Neapolitan, who laughed at everything he said; the second, the scarred and sun-burnt knight of Malta, on whose handsome features were marked a stern gravity and settled melancholy, no less striking than his garb. He was now enveloped in the dark mantle of his order, having on the left shoulder an eight-pointed cross, sewn in white velvet upon black cloth; the same sacred badge appeared upon the housings of his horse, and various parts of his attire; in silver on his epaulettes, in red enamel on his black velvet forage-cap, and in scarlet cloth on the tops of his white leather gauntlets.

To my surprise, I understood that, before marching, solemn mass must be performed; and the visconte led me to the private oratory, at the altar of which stood Frà Adriano, the chaplain and confessor of the family. The chapel was as gorgeously decorated as many coloured marbles, painted windows, a roof of gilding and fresco, springing from columns covered with the richest mosaic, and shining tessellated floor, could make it. Near the altar stood the celebrated statue of the patron of the Alfieri—Sant' Ugo. It was of oak, carved, gilt, and evidently of great antiquity; but so hideous that it might have passed for Thor, or any monster-god whom our rude forefathers worshipped in the dark ages of druidical superstition. At St. Eufemio, this image was regarded with the utmost veneration; from a belief in the wondrous miracles it wrought, and a tradition that it had

been transported through the air by angels, from the saint's little hermitage, in the beautiful plain, near Palermo. Other relics in the chapel were viewed with no less reverence. I was shown a leg of the cock which crew to Peter, a rag of the virgin's petticoat, a packet of the egg-shells on which San Lorenzo was broiled, and a tooth of the blessed Ugo! which, from its size and the number of rings, bore so strong a resemblance to the tooth of a horse, that the venerable aspect and earnestness of Adriano scarcely restrained me from laughing outright.

"Fra Adriano is the oldest of our Calabrian priests," observed Luigi, in a whisper: "he has been the confessor of our family for three generations."

"Kneel with us, signor, if it be but to please the good father, who is now verging on his hundredth year," added the Maltese commander in the same low voice. "Saint John preserve him yet for many years to come; long after the grave has closed over me! He beheld my order when it was in the zenith of its power and glory. Yes, signor, he beheld the galleys of Malta sailing through the Straits of Messina, when the grand master Antonio de Vilhena, of most pious and valiant memory, unfurled against the infidels of Algeria the blessed banner of redemption. But these days have passed. The silver keys of Jerusalem, of Acre, and of Rhodes—three cities of strength, over which the knights of our order once held sway—are now paltry trophies in the hands of the British. Struck down by the hand of Napoleon, the banner of God and St. John has sunk for ever, and the red flag of Mahomet may now sweep every shore of the Mediterranean with impunity!" (Lord Exmouth's attack on Algiers did not take place till six years after this time.)

A hundred years spent in the gloomy and monotonous cloister! This priest had dwelt there from his childhood; and I sighed when contemplating the silver hairs, magnificent white beard, and calm features of this fine old man, and reflecting on the long life he had wasted away—a life which might otherwise have been valuable. To what a living tomb had zeal and superstitious piety consigned him!

But to proceed. When the incense had been burned, the wine drunk, the bell rung, the prayers said, and responses given, we softly withdrew; the sweet, low singing of the choristers, mingled with the pealing notes of the organ, filling the little oratory with a burst of melodious harmonies.

After glasses of coffee had been served hastily round, we leaped on our horses; our appearance being the signal for the column of volunteers to get under arms. With no little

trouble, we formed them into something like military order, and they moved off in sections of three files abreast. The Maltese knight enjoyed with me a hearty laugh at their shuffling march; but I had no doubt that, after being a few weeks under the tuition of our drill sergeants, they would all make smart soldiers. Though we marched without the sound of drum or bugle, music was not wanting; two or three improvisatori who were in the ranks struck up a martial song, adapted to the occasion, and the others soon acquired the chorus—even Santugo and his friends joined; and the bold swell of five hundred manly voices ringing in the blue welkin, and awakening the echoes of the wooded hills, produced an effect at once impressive and animating.

These brave hearts formed the nucleus of that *Calabrian corps* which, on many future occasions, fought with such indomitable spirit under the British standard; which shared in the glories of Misida, the capture of Crotone, the expedition to Naples, in 1809, and the storming of the Castle of Ischia, when Colonna, with all his garrison, surrendered to the bravery of Macfarlane and his soldiers.

As I rode round an angle of the villa, I observed the Signora Bianca, muffled in black velvet and sable, watching our departure, from one of the windows. Raising my cocked hat, I bowed, with something more than respect in my manner, at the same time making Cartouche curvet, and riding with as much of the air of "the staff" as I could assume. The graceful girl stepped out into one of the little stone balconies which projected before all the upper windows of the mansion, and I immediately pulled up; she smiled, and waved her hand in adieu. Standing up in my stirrups—"Signora," said I, in a low voice, "never shall I forget your kind anxiety for my safety last night; and believe me, Bianca, since the first moment we met at Palermo—but the viscount is calling. The enemy are before us, and I may never see you again—adieu!"

"Addio! a riveder la!" she murmured; the blush which the first part of my farewell called forth giving way to paleness.

"May it soon happen, signora!" I added, as, spurring Cartouche, I galloped after the free corps, with my heart beating a little more tumultuously than it had done for a long time—at least since we left England.

"Ohi, Dundas!" cried the viscount, as I came up at a canter, "what has caused you to loiter?"

"My horse's near hind shoe was clattering, and I merely drew up for an instant to examine it," I replied; very unwilling he should suspect or learn the truth.

On our march, my new friends beguiled the tedium of the way by vivid descriptions of their encounters with the enemy, between whom and the Calabrese there had long been maintained a bloodthirsty war of reprisal. Every peasant who fell into the hands of the French, having arms in his possession,—even if it were but the ordinary stiletto or ex-goad,—was instantly dragged before a standing court-martial, tried, and shot, or else hanged. Every means were adopted by Regnier to exterminate the roving bands of armed peasantry and fierce banditti, who incessantly harassed his troops during all their marches and movements,—but in vain. Every tree, shrub, and rock, concealed a rifle, and a stern eye, whose aim was deadly. In secluded spots, where all seemed calm and peaceful but a moment before, or the stillness of the leafy solitude had been broken only by the tap of the drum, or the carol of the merry French soldier,—whose native buoyancy of heart often breaks forth in a joyous chorus on the line of march,—when least expected, overwhelming ambuscades of wild mountaineers would start up from height and hollow, galling the march of some unhappy party; suddenly the foliage would blaze with the fire of rifles, their sharp reports ringing through the wood, while whistling bullets bore each one a message of death, responded to by the shrieks and groans of dying men.

But my Italian friends could not yet boast of the frightful massacre of Orzammaro.

By the wayside, I observed a mound of fresh earth, above which rose a cross, composed of two rough pieces of wood. It was the grave of Kraunz, the leader of our Corsicans, who yesterday had been alive, and at their head; to-day, Frank himself could not have wished him lower,—poor man!

As we passed through St. Eufemio, the inhabitants followed us *en masse*, filling the air with shouts, and cries of "Long live Ferdinand of Naples! Death to the Corsican tyrant, and Massena the apostate! Death to their soldiery, the slayers of our people!" and the convent bells rang, as for a general jubilee. "Benissimo!" cried I, waving my hat, "Live Caroline! Viva la Reina!" and another tremendous shout, accompanied by the clapping of hands, rent the air.

The sun was now up, and the increasing heat of the morning made a halt for a few minutes not only desirable but requisite. We dismounted at the door of a café kept by a Sicilian (the Sicilians are famed for their ices), and procured a cool and delightful cup of limonée, and long glasses filled with what the seller called sherbet. Meanwhile, our volunteers were busily imbibing all the liquids they could procure from the stationary acquaiuoili, or water-sellers, who retail cool beve-

rages to the passengers, at the corner of every street in a Neapolitan town. A gaudily-painted barrel, swinging on an iron axis fixed between the door-posts, is the principal feature of these establishments, which generally open at a street corner; the rough columns supporting it are garnished with tin drinking-cups, scoured bright as silver, and in these the seller supplies his customers with pure and sparkling water, cooled by snow introduced through the bung-hole of the cask every time a draught is required.

"Caro signor, give a poor rogue a bajocch to get a draught of cold water!" is often the cry of the beggars in hot weather.

Thus refreshed, Santugo ordered his volunteers once more to march, and the road for our camp was resumed. After a short halt in the great forest, during noon, we reached the British forces, which still occupied their ground on the banks of the Mucato, where I had left them on the preceding evening. With much formality, I presented the visconte and his companions to the general. The camp was already crowded with other volunteers, who came pouring in from all quarters, imploring arms and ammunition, and clamouring to be led against the enemy.

"Napoli! Napoli! Ferdinando nostro e la santa fede! Revenge or death!" was the shout of the Calabrians: it rang from the gorge of Orzamarzo to the cliffs of Capo di Larma; and all of the population who could draw a dagger, or wield an ox-goad, rushed to arms, panting for vengeance. In less than two days, we had a corps of two thousand picked soldiers embodied, armed, equipped, eager for battle, and officered by the noblest families in the provinces. Clad in their white uniform,—until then there was a ludicrous want of similarity in their garb,—they appeared a fine-looking body of men, and every way the reverse of their countrymen of the Southern Provinces; brave, resolute, and yielding every requisite obedience to those Italian cavalieri whom the general appointed to lead them into the field.

The peasantry brought us in provisions in plenty, but refused to receive payment in return; saying that they "could not sufficiently reward those who came to free them from the hateful tyranny of the French," led by Massena, the renegade peasant of Nice.

On the night of the 3rd, I was despatched on the spur to the Podestà, or chief magistrate, of St. Eufemio, with a printed manifesto, addressed by Sir John Stuart to the Italian people; inviting them to rise in arms, and throw off the yoke of France; promising them protection for their persons, property, laws, and religion; offering arms to the brave and

loyal, and a free pardon to those whom Buonaparte had either seduced or terrified into temporary adherence to his brother Joseph.

Santugo commanded the first battalion of the free corps; which was no sooner formed into something like fighting order, than we broke up our camp and moved to attack General Regnier; who, having been apprised of our debarkation, made a most rapid march from Reggio, collecting on the route all his detached corps, for the purpose of engaging us without delay.

On the evening of the 3rd, il cavaliere del Castagno, a captain in Santugo's battalion, brought us intelligence that Regnier, at the head of 4,000 infantry, 300 cavalry, and four pieces of artillery, had taken up a position near Maida, a town ten miles distant from our camp, and that another corps of three regiments, under the marchese di Monteleone, was *en route* to form a junction with him. These advices determined our leader to march at once on Regnier's position, and attack him ere the marchese came up. Accordingly, four companies of Sir Louis de Watteville's regiment, under the command of Major Fisher, were left to protect our stores and a small field-work which, under the direction of Signor Pietro Navarro, of the Sicilian engineers, had been thrown up on our landing, and planted with cannon. Our little army marched next day (the 4th) in three brigades; which, together with the advance under Colonel Kempt, and a reserve of artillery with four six-pounders and two howitzers, under Major Le Moine, made barely five thousand men, exclusive of the free corps.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF MAIDA.

THE morning of the battle was one of the most beautiful and serene I ever beheld, even in Italy. As the curtain of night was drawn aside, and the bright beams of morning lighted up the giant masses of the Apennines, the green rice-fields, and luxuriant vineyards; white-walled towns and villages, solitary convents and feudal castles, waving woods, and the indentations of the rocky coast, all became tinted with their most pleasing hues. But the surpassing splendour of the sun—in whose joyous effulgence the whole glorious landscape seemed palpitating with delight—the clearness of the atmosphere, and the deep blue of the wondrous vault above us, were all forgotten or unheeded; we thought only of the foe in

position before us ; while the dropping fire from our flankers who had commenced skirmishing with the French *trailleurs*, kept us keenly alive to the desperate work which had to be accomplished ere the sun sank below the sea. When that hour came, might I be alive to behold it ? How many an eye that looked on its glorious rising, would then be closed for ever !

General Regnier's troops were encamped below Maida, on the face of a thickly-wooded hill, which sloped into the plain of St. Eufemio. The Amato, a river which, though fordable, has very muddy and marshy banks, ran along the front of his line, while his flanks were strengthened and defended by groves of laurel-bushes, and a thick impervious underwood, which he had filled with scattered light troops. Cavalière Castagno by his influence among the peasantry, obtained hourly any intelligence we required ; and just before the battle began, he conveyed to me, for the general's information, the unpleasant tidings, that Monteleone's corps, to the number of three thousand men, were now moving into position on the French right. General Regnier was now at the head of eight thousand bayonets, while we had little more than half that number, exclusive of the Calabrians, on whom, as yet, we could not rely much in the field ; and they were, consequently, to form a corps of reserve : much to the annoyance of the gallant Santugo and his friends.

We marched in close column of subdivisions, parallel with the sea-shore, until we had nearly turned Regnier's left ; and as our movements were all made in a spacious plain, with the morning sun glaring on our serried ranks and burnished arms, he had an excellent view of our numbers and intentions. Had Regnier quietly maintained his position on the hill, we would soon have turned it altogether, and thus placed him between us and the sea ; where Sir Sydney's squadron lay, broadside to the shore, with ports open and guns double-shotted. To us the movement was full of peril : our retreat might be cut off ; while, in consequence of the smallness of our force, the difficulties of access, and the natural strength of the ridge on which the enemy was posted, we should have found it no easy task to drive him back.

Whether the Frenchman feared he should be outflanked, or was encouraged by his numbers to attack us, I know not ; but he soon crossed the Amato, in order of battle, and moved his entire force into the plain, where his corps of cavalry—an arm, of which we were, most unfortunately, deficient—would act more effectively.

As yet, not a shot had been fired : the enemy continued advancing towards us steadily and in line ; their arms flashing, colours fluttering in the breeze, and drums beating in sharp and measured time. They halted by sound of trumpet, and, at the head of a glittering staff, Regnier swept, at a gallop, from the right flank to the left.

"Gentlemen," said Sir John to his staff, on first observing this new movement of the enemy ; "ride at full speed to the battalions, and order them to deploy into line. Mr. Lascelles, desire Cole to take up his ground where he is now. Dundas, you will direct Major Le Moine to get his guns into position on that knoll, where the wooden cross stands—to have them unlimbered, and ready to open on the enemy's line the moment he deems it within range. Order Lieutenant-Colonel Kempt to throw forward the whole of his light infantry, double quick, and in extended order to 'feel' the enemy, and keep their tirailleurs in check."

Saluting with one hand, I wheeled Cartouche round with the other, gave him the spur, and galloped on my mission ; delivering the order to deploy into line as I passed the heads of the different columns. In three minutes Le Moine had his field-pieces at the appointed post, and wheeled round ; the iron pintles drawn, the limbers cast off, and the muzzles pointed to the enemy. Leaping from his horse, he levelled, and fired the first shot himself.

It was the signal gun, announcing that the work of destruction and death had begun in grim earnest. My heart beat thick and fast, every pulse quickened, and a proud, almost fierce and wild sensation, swelled within me, as the sharp report rang through the clear still air, and the white smoke floated away from the green knoll, revealing the dark cannon that bristled around it.

I reined up my gallant grey on an eminence, to watch the effect of the ball. General Regnier, escorted by fifty dragoons, their brass helmets and bright swords flashing in the sun, was at that moment galloping back to his right flank ; and on this group the shot took effect : a commotion was visible among them immediately, and they rode on at a quicker pace, leaving a dark heap behind them—a rider and his horse lay dying or dead. The whole of our field-pieces now opened a rapid cannonade on the French line, and continued it incessantly during the action.

By this time the light infantry were hotly engaged ; the Sicilian volunteers, the Corsicans, and our provisional light battalion, were filling the dark-green underwood, and the leafy

groves along the banks of the Amato, with smoke ; while hill, rock, and woodland rang with the ceaseless patter of the fire they rained on the French *tirailleurs*, who blazed at them in return with equal spirit, from behind every screen afforded by the irregularity of the ground. As the lines drew nearer, the light troops, as if by tacit agreement, were withdrawn by sound of bugle ; and by nine o'clock in the morning the battle had become general, from centre to flanks.

The corps which formed the right of our advanced line was a provisional battalion commanded by Colonel Kempt, and composed of the light companies of six of our regiments from Sicily, and that of De Watteville's corps, with a hundred and fifty picked men of the 35th, under Major Robinson. These troops were opposed to the 1st regiment of French light infantry (the favourite corps of the emperor), which they mauled in glorious style ; pouring in a deadly fire at about a hundred yards' distance. On their left was the corps of General Ackland, composed of the 78th, or Ross-shire Highlanders, the 81st regiment, and five companies of De Watteville's, with the 58th, under the late General Sir John Oswald, then colonel.

General Cole, with the provisional battalion of grenadiers, and the 27th, formed our left. Such was the disposition of our little army when engaging the enemy, whose force mustered almost two to one. Sir Sydney Smith by this time had taken a position with his ships and gun-boats, to act and co-operate if circumstances favoured ; but, much to the annoyance of the gallant sailor, his fleet could yield us no assistance during that day's fighting.

Led by the chivalric Macleod of Geanies—a brave officer, who afterwards fell in Egypt—the 78th rushed upon the enemy, with the wild and headlong impetuosity of their countrymen. I was close by their dashing colonel, when, sword in hand, he led them on.

“Forward the Ross-shire Buffs ! Let them feel the bayonet—charge !” And animated to a sort of martial phrenzy by the shrill pibroch—whose wild and sonorous war-blast rang as loudly on the plain of Maida as ever it did by the glassy Loch-duich, when the bale-fires of the M'Kenzie blazed on continent and isle—the bold Highlanders flung themselves with a yell upon the masses of the enemy. They were opposed to the French 42nd regiment of grenadiers—a corps led by that brave French officer upon whom Buonaparte had bestowed the Calabrian title of *marchese di Monteleone*. Riding in advance of his soldiers, by words and gestures the most enthusiastic, he urged them to advance, to keep together, to hold their

ground. But his sabre was brandished, and the war-cry shouted, in vain; and vain, too, were the desperate efforts of his grenadiers before the tremendous charge of our Highlanders. Overwhelmed and broken, they were driven back in confusion, and pursued with slaughter by the 78th, until the latter were so far in advance of our whole line that Sir John sent me after them at full gallop, with an order to halt and re-form, in case of their being cut off.

I delivered the order to Macleod, who was stooping from his horse in the arms of a serjeant of his regiment, and almost unable to speak. A rifle-ball had passed through his breast, within an inch of the heart, inflicting a most severe and dangerous wound; yet he quitted not the field, but remained on horseback, and at the head of his Highlanders, during the remainder of the action and the fierce pursuit which followed it.

Drumlugas, a captain of the corps, in the *mêlée* unhorsed the marchese, who narrowly escaped with the loss of his steed and sabre; these remained the trophies of the victor, who distinguished himself by more conquests and captures ere the day was done.

Colonel Kempt's corps was now within a few yards of the enemy, and the deadly fire which they had been pouring upon each other was suspended, "as if by mutual agreement," as Sir John stated in his despatch; "and in close, compact order, and with awful silence, they advanced towards each other, until the bayonets began to cross. At this momentous crisis the enemy became appalled; they broke, and endeavoured to fly; but it was too late: they were overtaken with most dreadful slaughter." Ere they fled—

"Dundas, ride to Brigadier-General Ackland; let him push forward his brave corps, and complete that which Kempt has so nobly begun!" cried the general. I departed with this order, on the spur; but it was anticipated by Ackland, who was already leading on in triumph, through clouds of smoke, and over heaps of dead and dying, the 78th and 81st, shoulder to shoulder, they rushed on, with bayonets levelled, to the charge—cool, compact, and resolute. Discomfited by their formidable aspect, and the impetuosity of this movement, the whole of the French left wing gave way, and retired in confusion, leaving the plain strewn with killed and wounded. The river Amato was choked with the bodies and crimsoned with the blood of those who, unable by wounds or fatigue to cross the stream, became entangled among the thick sedges of its banks; where they perished miserably, either by the bayonets of the pursuers, or by drowning.

At that moment, a dashing French officer, at the head of three hundred heavy dragoons, made a desperate attempt to retrieve the honour of France and the fortune of the day; rushing forward at full speed through the white clouds of rolling smoke, he attempted to turn the left of the 81st, and capture three field-pieces posted between that regiment and the Ross-shire Buffs.

"Allons, mes enfans! Napoléon! Napoléon! allons!" cried he, waving his sabre aloft. "Vive l'empereur! Guerre à mort!" was the answering shout of his fierce troopers, as they swept onward in solid squadron; their brandished swords and long line of brass helmets gleaming in the sun, while their tricoloured guidons and waving crests of black horse-hair danced on the passing breeze. But the steady fire of the Highlanders made them recoil obliquely, and I found myself most unexpectedly among them, when spurring onward with the order to Ackland, to deliver which with speed, I had the temerity to ride through a little hollow raked by the fire of the three guns already mentioned, and along which these dragoons had advanced unseen amid the smoke.

The press was tremendous; riders cursed and shrieked as they were thrown and trod to death; horses were plunging and kicking; and both fell fast on every side. Twenty swords at once gleamed around me, and their cuts whistled on every side, as I attempted desperately to break through the dense, heaving mass of men and horses. My heart leaped within me, my brain reeled, and my blood seemed on fire; I struck to the right, left, and rear, giving point and out with the utmost rapidity; never attempting to ward off the flashing blades that played around my bare head—for my gay staff hat, with its red and white plume, had vanished in the *mêlée*. I must inevitably have been unhorsed and cut down, but for a sudden volley that was poured in point blank upon the cavalry from the dark brushwood covering one side of the gorge. A score of saddles were emptied, and many a strong horse and gallant rider rolled on the turf in the agonies of death; while all the survivors, save their officers alone, retreated at full gallop to the French position.

Next moment, the whole line of the dashing 90th, led on by Lieutenant-Colonel Ross, started out from their ambush in the thick underwood, where the regiment lay concealed, during the smoke and confusion of the battle, unseen even by ourselves. Having only landed that morning from Messina, they had come up with our army during the heat of the contest; and Ross, observing the movement of the enemy's cavalry, threw his battalion into the thicket, the sudden flank-

were from which completely foiled their attempt upon our cannon. One man only of the 20th fell; but he was deeply regretted by the whole regiment—Captain Maclean (the son of Gillian Maclean, of Scallecastle, in the Isle of Mull), an officer who had served with distinction in Holland, in the first expedition to Egypt, and elsewhere.

The Frenchman who had led on the dragoons seemed to be one of those daring and reckless fellows who scorn fight, and laugh at danger; so, venting a malediction on his runaway troops, he rode alone towards me. The 20th and other corps near us, seeing that we were well matched, with a chivalric resolution to see fair play, suspended their fire, to let us prove our mettle, while they looked on.

Being an expert swordsman, and master of my horse, so far that I could clear a five-barred gate or cross a hunting country with any man, I had but slight fear as to the issue of the encounter; yet it flashed upon my mind, that to be signally defeated in front of our whole army would be worse than death. My antagonist was about thirty years of age, with a form modelled like that of a young Hercules; and his aspect and bearing led me to conclude that the encounter would be a tough one. He belonged to the staff, and on his breast glittered the star of the iron crown of Lombardy; a badge bestowed upon five hundred knights (the flower of his officers) created by Napoleon on his recent coronation at Milan, as king of Italy.

We advanced within twelve yards of each other, and then rode our horses warily round in a circle, each watching the eyes and movements of the other, with stern caution and alert vigilance, such as the time and circumstances could alone draw forth: the life of one depended on the death of the other. At last I rushed furiously to the assault, making a cut seemingly at the head of my antagonist, but changing it adroitly to his bridle hand; the stroke missed the man, but cut through both curb and snaffle rein. I deemed him now completely at my mercy; but as he had a chain-rein attached to his bridle, nothing was gained by the first stroke.

"Monsieur, I disdain to return the compliment!" said he carelessly, while, with a laugh of triumphant scorn, he shook his strong chain-bridle. Provoked by his insolent nonchalance, I dealt a backward blow with such force and dexterity that he began to press me in turn, and with skill that I had some trouble in meeting. His charger was so well trained, that he was aided in every stroke and thrust by its movements, while Cartouche, startled by the clash of the sabres, began to snort and rear. The restless spirit of the fiery English blood-horse

was roused, and a shell thrown by a French field-howitzer exploding close by, completed his terror and my discomfiture : Cartouche plunged so fearfully that my sabre fell from my grasp, and I nearly lost my seat while endeavouring, by curb and caress, to reduce him to subjection. I was thus quite at the mercy of the Frenchman, who, generously disuading to take the advantage that my restive horse gave him, merely said, "Gardez, monsieur!" and bowing, lowered the point of his sabre in salute and galloped away, greeted by a hearty cheer from the 20th and Ackland's brigade.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COTTAGE ON THE MAIDA ROAD—THE EAGLE.

BROKEN by the impetuous and simultaneous advance of our brigades, Regnier's whole line of battle gave way, and retired from the field with precipitation—especially the left wing—leaving the position strewn with dead and wounded, and presenting a terrible scene of carnage and agony, as we pressed triumphantly forward. The right and centre retreated in tolerable order, covered by the cavalry ; but the left was swept away and almost annihilated by the fierce charge of the Ross-shire Buffs. Our light battalion, commanded by Colonel Kempt, and Macleod with his regiment, flushed with victory, were ordered forward immediately in pursuit. They followed it up in double quick time for upwards of three miles, killing and capturing an immense number of the enemy, whose rear they galled by a continual fire from the eminences commanding their line of march.

When Sir John again sent me after them with an order to halt, I found them briskly engaged with a small band of fugitives, who had thrown themselves into a little cottage by the wayside, over which a gigantic chestnut threw its ample shadow. From the garden-wall and barricaded door and windows, the French maintained a spirited fire, to defend a standard and eagle which Regnier's son, a young sub-lieutenant, had carried in there, instead of continuing his flight. This rural post was enveloped in the blaze of musketry and clouds of snow-white smoke ; steel bayonets bristled above the green hedges, through which, and the shattered casements, red flashes broke incessantly ; while fierce faces, pale with anger and chagrin, appeared at every opening.

"Shall I ride to Le Moine, to send up a four-pounder, and blow the place about their ears?" said I to Kempt.

"Cannon against a sheiling!" exclaimed Macleod, backing his horse over the heaps of dead. "No, no; let the Buffs storm it. I will lead them on. Forward the Ross-shiremen!"

"Forward;" I added; "for the cavalry have halted, and seem disposed to return and engage. On, then, colonel; and a dozen of wine from the last officer over the wall!"

"CUIDICH'N RHI!" (the motto of the regiment), cried Macleod, dashing spurs into his horse. "Charge, Seventy-eighth!"

A shout burst from the ranks, and the brave fellows rushed to closer conflict. I urged forward Cartouche, and the spirited horse shook the foam from his bit, as, snorting and rearing up, he bounded over the enclosure of the garden, and came down crash among the mass of Frenchmen, whose bayonets formed a steel hedge around me. I must have been destroyed in a moment, but for the strenuous exertions of Macleod and his gallant Buffs, who came pouring in at the gap my horse had made, and engaged the enemy hand to hand—fighting with that fierce and unconquerable ardour which has enabled those brave sons of the north to sweep all the troops of Europe before them.

I was not slow in seconding their efforts, and made good use of my sabre: one instant it descended upon musket-barrels and bear-skin caps, and the next inflicted some deadly wound, which at that wild and exciting time was a matter of exulting triumph to me. Terrible were the bayonet wounds given and received in that short encounter; many poor fellows who were beaten to the earth were trodden to death beneath the hoofs of our horses, and in five minutes the defenders of the cottage surrendered. The walls without and within were piled up with dead and dying, and its once blooming garden was trodden flat, cumbered with bodies, and drenched with blood. But another desperate encounter was yet before me.

"The colours! the eagle!" exclaimed Macleod, breaking in amongst the prisoners; "where is the officer who bore the eagle?"

"Escaped, by Heaven!" answered Oliver Lascelles, who galloped up at that moment, and cleared the garden-wall at a flying leap. "There he goes on the bald-faced nag. A hundred to one the standard is lost!" A muttered exclamation of regret and mortification burst from us all on beholding the bearer of the eagle riding at full speed after the retreating cavalry.

"Seventh!" cried Macleod, rushing to his horse; "He has

escaped by the rear. Come on, gentlemen, we will have a steeple-chase for it!"

"Stole away! hark forward!" exclaimed Lascelles, with a reckless laugh, as his nag once more cleared the wall. The mounted officers all pushed onward at full gallop; but they were soon outstripped by my noble grey, which rapidly brought me up with the fugitive. On finding himself nearer the French rear-guard than the victors, and perhaps disdaining to fly from a single foe, young Regnier reined up on an eminence near the Amato, and with his sabre lashed by the knot to his wrist, with bent brows, and eyes flashing fire with determination, he awaited my onset. His horse was a small French trooper, the straight neck, drooping ears, and close flanks of which showed its inferiority of breed when compared with my high-headed, bold-eyed, and bluff-chested charger.

I charged him with such fury, that both man and horse were almost overturned by the shock; and, parrying his thrust, I dealt a blow which had certainly cleft his jaws, but for the thick brass scales of his shako. He was stunned, and reeled in his saddle for a moment, striking blindly and at random. At that instant the French cavalry trumpets sounded an *advance*, and I was compelled to press him more boldly than ever. Grasping the colour-staff with my bridle hand, the flag was nearly rent between us; while he endeavoured to hew off the eagle with his sabre. He glared at me like a tiger, and cut fiercely at my left hand, which the twisted reins and thick military glove alone saved from being slashed off; but at the second blow his sabre turned in his grasp, and the blade was shattered into fragments on the stout ash-pole. In the heat of the moment, my sword was raised to cut him down: he was completely at my mercy. He was young, brave, and handsome. I remembered how his countryman had spared me but an hour before, and could I be less generous? Determined, however, to carry off the colours, I grasped him by the belt, placed my foot under his left stirrup, and hurled him to the ground on the other side. The moment he let go the staff, I struck spurs into my grey, and galloped off with the prize to our own troops, who had watched the combat from the eminence on which the contested cottage stood.

My heart bounded with exultation as I bore aloft the tri-coloured trophy; it was so torn with shot and shell splinters, that we could never discover to what regiment it belonged. How different must have been the feelings of the poor sub-

lieutenant, while borne off by the French cavalry; who, returning to the rescue, discharged their carbines after me; but I was happily beyond the range of their fire.

The battle was now completely over, and every hostile sound had died away. No trace now remained of all that gallant host, whose bayonets had flashed back the morning rays from the ridge of Maida, save the wounded and the dead: the distant glitter of arms and eddying clouds of dust, marked the route of columns hurrying in full retreat towards the shores of the Adriatic. Four thousand Frenchmen lay dead or wounded on the plain, exhibiting a melancholy picture of war and its attendant horrors—more especially on the day succeeding the action. A French account of the battle of St. Eufemio, as they style it, states that Regnier left fifteen hundred on the field; but we had substantial proofs that this number was far below the truth. Our own loss was trifling; one officer only was killed (Macleod of the 20th), but Major Hamil of the Maltese, and many others, lay severely wounded on the plain; our casualties, however, amounted to only three hundred and twenty-six. When riding towards our position, to present my trophy to the general, I had to pick my way with the utmost nicety, to avoid treading on the wounded, who filled the air with groans and ceaseless cries for “water!” as they lay unheeded, bleeding—too many of them to death—under a blazing Italian sun.

The evening, like the morning, was serene and beautiful. The dense white smoke, which during the whole day enveloped the plain of Maida and overhung the dark forest of St. Eufemio, had now floated away to the distant sea. The volleying musketry and hollow thunder of the cannon awoke no more the echoes of the lofty hills, and the deep dingles of the woods; a mournful silence seemed to have succeeded to the roar, the turmoil, and carnage of that eventful day,—eventful at least to those who witnessed and survived it.

It is a deplorable sight—when one is calm, or suffering under a reaction of spirits so lately excited to the utmost stretch, and after the fierce tumult of a hot engagement has evaporated—to behold a vast plain befuddled with human blood, and strewn with the bodies of men and horses, mingled with arms, broken cannon, splintered shells, balls half buried in the turf, shattered drums, and torn standards—on every hand, destruction, agony, and death; while ghastly piles of slain mark where the fiercest encounters have taken place. Alas! how changed the aspect of the gay young officer, or the stout and toil-worn veteran, when, shorn of their trap-

pings, they lie weltering in blood—death glazing the eyes that have no kind hand to close them, and each yielding up his life like a dog in a ditch, unnoticed and unknown!

“The groan, the roll in dust, the all-white eye
Turned back within its socket,—these reward
Your rank and file by thousands; while the rest
May win, *perhaps*, a ribbon at the breast.”

CHAPTER LX.

LIVES FOR DUCATS!—BIANCA D'ALFIERI.

THE remains of General Regnier's army were now in full retreat for Crotona, a seaport of Naples, harassed and galled by the Highlanders, and by the free corps under the duca di Bagnara and cavalier del Castagno. The brigands and a host of armed peasantry also hovered like storm-clouds on their skirts, and all who fell to the rear, under wounds or fatigue, perished by that favourite Italian weapon—the knife.

On rejoining the main body of our army, I found the general in the highest state of glee at the glorious success of the day; he was seated on horseback in the midst of the field, a holster-flap serving as his desk, writing a hurried despatch, recounting our first regular brush with the enemy in Calabria. My arrival with the standard added a new and important paragraph to the general's missive. While he was complimenting and rallying me by turns, our interview was interrupted by cries of Frenchmen for succour, proceeding from a thicket close by. There I found six French officers, and the same number of soldiers, bound with cords to the trees, and surrounded by some of Santugo's free corps, who were hammering their flints and loading, with great deliberation, for the purpose of making targets of these unfortunates. Among the prisoners I recognized the gallant leader of the cavalry, whom I had encountered in the early part of the day. His arms were corded behind him round the trunk of an oak, and he was nearly blinded by the blood which flowed from a wound on his head, inflicted apparently by the butt of a musket, or the knob of a peasant's club.

“Save us, Monsieur Aide-de-camp!” cried he, in broken English; “these Italian ruffians know not the rules of nations, or the courtesy of war. Save us from such base poltroons! It is hard for brave men to die so helplessly.”

“Giacomo—how now, rascal! Is this the way you mean

to treat our prisoners?" I angrily asked of Santugo's follower, who seemed to be the officiating authority. "Unbind them instantly, and with these mule-headed rogues of yours, rejoin the free corps! But first, read to them the general's proclamation concerning the treatment of prisoners." As I severed the cords which bound the staff officer, the Calabrians vented their anger in loud murmurings.

"Eh, via! what would you do, signor?" asked Belloni, with an air of sulky surprise.

"Olà, damnazione!" growled the rest, as they grimly handled their knives, and closed round the Frenchmen; seemingly resolved that their prey should not escape. Poor fellows! it was an anxious moment for them. Taking from my sabretache a copy of Sir John's proclamation to the Calabrians, I read it aloud; it enjoined them to treat generously all captives who fell into their hands, and offered rewards for every one conducted by them in safety to the British camp—twenty ducats for an officer, and six for each private soldier. Immediately there arose a shout of "Il denaro—the money!" I cast the ducats (part of what I had won from Truffi, the crook-back) amongst them, with ill-concealed impatience and scorn. The money was gathered up hurriedly, and the prisoners were unbound. Thus, for a hundred and fifty pieces of silver, I saved the lives of twelve human beings, who would have been butchered without remorse, but for my opportune arrival and intervention.

I led the reprieved men to Sir John Stuart, who was still intent on his despatch. Surrounded by whole hecatombs of slain and wounded—by sights and sounds replete with agony and horror—the old soldier continued to scribble on "for the information of his royal highness," with an expression and air of as perfect coolness, as if seated in the most comfortable drawing-room at home. A group of adjutants and orderlies stood round him, reporting the various casualties, and making up their lists of killed, wounded, and missing. They fell back on our approach.

I presented the prisoners, among whom were an aide-de-camp, the lieutenant-colonel of a Swiss battalion, and my brave antagonist, whom I discovered to be the famous General Compere. He had been unhorsed and disarmed by Captain Drumlugas, who gave him in charge of the free corps, from whose gentle wardship I had rescued him. The privates were poor Swiss conscripts, who had been marched from their native mountains to fight under the eagles of the emperor. They were placed among the rest of our prisoners, who now numbered about a thousand; these were formed in

a solid square, and surrounded by the Sicilian battalions, with two four-pounders loaded with cannister and grape, to keep the forlorn band in complete subjection.

As I accompanied General Compere in search of a surgeon, to dress his wound, we passed a deep trench, or natural chasm of rock, in which about seven hundred French dead were being hastily interred, to prevent their bodies producing malaria, or being stripped and mutilated by the peasantry. A wing of les chasseurs Britanniques, working with their jackets off, were performing the duty of sextons. Compere paused to observe them.

"Poor fellows!" said he, looking down on the heaped dead within that hideous catacomb. "This morning, how merrily they marched from Maida! How many a young and brave heart, that was then swelling with courage and ardour, is lying here—crushed, cold, and still!" His fine, bronzed face clouded for a moment with the deepest dejection and mortification, while surveying the ghastly trench where his soldiers lay piled one on another, with arms, knapsacks, and harness, just as they were found; but his proud eye brightened as he turned towards the darkening hills, where the far-off clouds of dust, curling like smoke in the distance, marked the line of Regnier's quick retreat.

"Hah!" added he, gaily, "France yet swarms with brave soldiers; and Massena will soon show your haughty general that Naples is not to be won and lost on Maida only. He is 'the child of victory;' and fortune will soon smile again on the soldiers of the emperor. As for this day's field, about which they will doubtless make a great noise in England—poh! 'tis a mere battle of egg-shells to what I have seen, even in Italy—this land of cowards! Had you been on the fields of Arcole and Lodi—had you seen our victorious legions sweep the Romans from the mountains of Imola—'twould have done your heart good. Faith! one who has captured Naples, fought in Apulia, invested Gaeta, and seen the corpses piled chin-deep in the redoubt of San Andero, must know what campaigning is! But allons! monsieur; if it please you, let me get my poor broken head dressed." I hailed one of the medical staff (Dr. Macneisa of ours), who was passing near us, and in a few minutes Compere's wound was bathed and bandaged up, with a care and tenderness of which he seemed deeply sensible.

Macneisa had scarcely retired, when we were informed that the numerous prisoners had become refractory, and Sir John was about to give them a dose from the field-pieces; but Compere hastened to the spot, and by his presence reduced

them to subjection. They were then formed in sections, and strongly escorted, preparatory to their march to the coast, where the boats of Sir Sydney's fleet were in waiting to embark them.

"En arrière—marche!" cried the crest-fallen Compere, half-forgetting that his authority was no more; and the dark, disarmed mass moved off towards the sea, encircled by a hedge of glittering bayonets. "Dieu vous bénisse!" said the French general, raising his cocked hat; "Monsieur aide-de-camp, I shall never forget your kindness. Adieu—a thousand adieux!" And I saw him no more—at least, not as a prisoner.

On their retreat to Crotona, the French were closely followed by Macleod with the 73th, les chasseurs Britanniques, and Santugo's free corps, with orders to attack them on every occasion, and to endeavour to dislodge them entirely from Calabria Ulteriore. As their route lay along the shore of the Adriatic, and excellent opportunity was afforded for an effectual co-operation with our squadron in that sea, commanded by Captain (afterwards Sir William) Hoste, who never neglected an opportunity of galling their left flank whenever it came within range. On their right, a giant chain of mountains heaved upwards from the beach; and there the chiefs of the Masse, at the head of thousands panting for French blood, hovered in clouds, while Macleod pressed on their rear. For miles the shore was strewn with their killed and wounded. A position was hastily taken up at Catanzaro, but as hastily abandoned, before the overwhelming power of the Masse.

Our wounded were conveyed to St. Eufemio, where all the officers of the medical staff and fleet were in attendance on them daily. The solicitude of the sailors to be of use to us, and their anxiety to assist their wounded countrymen—the alacrity with which they brought supplies ashore—and the general tenderness and attention with which these rough tars treated their helpless brethren, elicited the highest encomiums from the general and the admiral, on board whose ship I had the honour to lodge the eagle (captured at Maida), which, with our despatches, was immediately transmitted to London in charge of Lieutenant Villiers of ours. Sir John wished me to have been the bearer; but, having cogent reasons for remaining in Calabria as long as possible, I contrived to excuse myself.

Our head-quarters were established at St. Eufemio, while Macleod, with three thousand men, laid siege to Crotona, and Hoste, with the Adriatic fleet of gun-boats, blockaded it by sea. Colonel Oswald was despatched to invest Scylla.

with orders to storm the castle of Monteleone on his way. These were the only strongholds of importance possessed by Regnier in the lower province. Immediately on his retreat, the famous Capo-bandito, Francatripa, with his ferocious horde, issued from the forest of St. Eufemio, and carried by storm a battlemented and palisadoed house at the place called the Sauveria, where an unfortunate party of the 23rd French light infantry, who formed its garrison, had been abandoned by Regnier in his flight. After a gallant resistance, the garrison were all cruelly massacred by these bloodthirsty patriots; even their little trumpeter, a boy only twelve years of age, perished beneath their poniards. Such a sample of Italian savagism called forth the indignation of our soldiers, who were well aware that by the courtesy of war the little band deserved very different treatment; but Francatripa excused himself, on the plea that it was but a part of that cruel system of reprisals maintained on both sides.

When the embarkation of prisoners, the landing of cannon and stores, the billeting of sick and wounded, the burial of the dead, and all the bustle succeeding the battle were over, I thought of paying a visit to my friends at the villa d'Alfieri. There could not be a better time; the visconte was at Crotona with his regiment, and I should have Bianca to myself.

My billet was at an inn of St. Eufemio, called "Il Concha d'Oro," from its sign, the Golden Shell. It was kept by a worthy bustling little Italian, Maestro Matteo Buzzone,—who, in truth, was not ill-named; his paunch being one of the first amplitude. I was enjoying a cigar and a decanter of iced Malvasia from the classic isles of Lipari, at an open lattice. Opposite, stood the house of the Signor Podestà, and I amused myself for some time by attempting to engage his daughter, a dark-eyed and red-cheeked damsel, in a flirtation; but my efforts were vain; though she appeared every moment at the window—watering flowers, arranging and disarranging the sunshade, bowing to a passer by, or what not.

The coolness of the evening induced me to think of a canter as far as the villa d'Alfieri. Summoning the groom, I desired him to saddle Cartouche; while, with rather more care than usual, I made my toilet,—for I was about to pay my devoirs to the fair Bianca. In those days, when one was not on duty, the uniform coat was worn open, with the lappelles buttoned back, to show the facings barred with silver; the sash and sword-belt being worn under it, and over a white kerseymer waistcoat. White breeches, long

jack-boots reaching above the knee, and equipped with jangling spurs, a heavy sabre with a brass sheath, buff gloves, and a cocked hat, with a drooping plume of scarlet and white feathers, completed the uniform of a British staff-officer.

I was just setting forth, when the ill-omened visage of the general's orderly, an old and sunburnt serjeant of the 81st, appeared at the door; erect as a ramrod, he raised his hand to his bear-skin cap, and placed a despatch in my hand.

"Hallo, Pierce! what's fresh now?"

"Sir John's compliments, sir, and he requests you will make all speed with this before the night sets in."

"Now, by all the gods! 'tis mere slavery, this staff work—I'll resign, and join the 62nd at Syracuse!" I muttered, while tearing open the note accompanying the despatch—an oblong document, addressed "O. H. M. S., to Lieut.-Col. Macleod, Ross-shire Buffs, Crotona."

"Dear Dundas (ran the note), You will ride forthwith, and deliver the accompanying letter at Crotona. If it suits your taste, stay there to partake of the fighting; but bring me word the moment it capitulates. Yours, &c.,

"JOHN STUART, Maj.-gen."

There was no course but to obey; yet I determined that my original purpose of visiting Bianca should not be interfered with. Thrusting the despatch into the sabretache, I buckled on my sabre, and in five minutes was *en route*, with all the worldly goods I possessed (at least in Calabria) strapped to the saddle before and behind me. In front were a pair of excellent pistols, newly oiled, flinted and loaded, and my blue cloak was rolled and buckled over the holsters; a valise was strapped behind me, containing a few changes of linen, and a fighting-jacket; a handful of cigars and an Army List, a horse-picker and a cork-screw, with a copy of "The Eighteen Manceuvres" (compiled by my namesake, Sir David Dundas), completed my camp equipage,—the whole of our heavy baggage having been left behind us in Sicily. The telescope—an appendage indispensable to a staff-officer—I carried in a pipe-clayed case, slung across my left shoulder.

Evening had almost given place to night when I arrived at the villa, and dismounted. Its ample façade was shrouded in gloom, and there were no signs of animation within, which was accounted for by the absence of Santugo, with all his dependants. I fastened my horse in the porch, for there was no one to receive it; the guard-room of the sbirri, or armed militia (which all the feudal nobles maintained until the

French invasion), was empty, and the quadrangle deserted. In remote places on the mountains some residences were still garrisoned or protected by the sbirri; and the landholders, abetted by these armed followers in their hereditary and inveterate feuds, became the perpetrators of outrages and atrocities of every kind.

In the vestibule I met Annina, a girl of Capri, and Bianca's favourite attendant; who, on beholding me, uttered an exclamation of delight: this was a good omen. I inquired, of course, for the viscontessa, and was informed that she was away to the prince's *conversazioni* at Nicastro, accompanied by the old Major Gismondo; but the Signora Bianca was at home, and, taking my hand, the frank Italian girl bade me accompany her. With my clattering boots, buckskin gloves, and worn accoutrements, I was in fitter trim for the march than for a lady's boudoir; but though my scarlet uniform, its embroidery and silver epaulettes, were faded and dingy, still they were quite service-like; and the coat yet showed the stains of blood from the wound I had received at Cafala, and the scratch in the skirmish near St. Eufemio.

Bianca was seated at a table, leaning her cheek upon her hand, intent on the sorrowful pages of "La Guiletta," her glossy curls clustering over her white arm, which the fashion of her country revealed to the dimpled elbow. The lamp by which she sat reading (a globe of light, upheld by a silver Atlas) shed its radiance full upon her eyes, which flashed brilliantly as she raised them on my entrance, with an expression in which surprise, confusion, and welcome were blended. Good omen the second! thought I. One is more apt to be egotistical when on the staff, than when doing duty as a mere regimental officer. The momentary flush which suffused her soft cheek and pale forehead, heightened her rare beauty; and at the moment when she arose, and threw back the rich masses of half-disordered curls with her white hand, her bust resplendent in the full glare of light, she seemed perfectly divine—in the language of her countrymen, a *Bell' idolo*.

Her constant companion, Luisa Gismondo, rising from an embroidery-frame, received me with a smile of welcome; she, too, was an enchanting girl, though much shorter in stature than Bianca; and never did the light of a candelabrum shine on curls more glossy, lips more rosy, softer blue eyes, or a face more brilliantly fair than poor Luisa's.

"O joy!" exclaimed the girls together; "and so, signor you have escaped the awful day at Maida?"

"Yes, ladies; and I hope to escape many more such days

I trust you will excuse this somewhat unseasonable visit, Signora Bianca," said I, slightly pressing her hand; "but being ordered off on the spur to Crotona, I have taken the liberty of visiting you, to be the bearer of any message or letters to Monsignore Luigi."

"How very kind of you, Signor Claude; but—but you do not proceed on the road to Crotona to-night?"

"I must, indeed, ride forward without delay; and, believe me, the general, kind-hearted though he be, would scarcely excuse my having made a detour, even to visit the villa d'Alfieri."

"O, Signor Claude, consider the state of the country!" said she earnestly, as I seated myself at the other end of the sofa, evincing not the least hurry in the world.

"Consider the nature of the service," the general would reply; but I believe that the wildest bandit in Italy—not even Francastipa, or Frà Diavolo—would molest a British soldier."

"You, perhaps, trust them too far. But, indeed, our oppressed people are not quite so bad as the Parisian papers have represented them."

By this time the distance between us on the sofa was greatly diminished, and I was about to say something very pointed and gallant, when Annina entered with a tray of refreshments, which she placed on the ebony table before us. I saw a cunning smile twinkling in her black eyes as she watched us, while arranging the ices, the crystal goblets, and a superbly-embossed caraffa of the wine of Gioja—a village of Calabria, famed for the excellence of its grapes. The viscontessa was, as I have said, at Nicastro, where I heartily hoped she would continue to enjoy herself, not wishing my *tête-à-tête* with these two charming girls to be interrupted by her presence, or that of the major.

"O, signor, tell us how you captured the standard at Maida?" asked Luisa.

Well aware how much such an encounter makes one shine in the estimation of women, I briefly related the whole affair, deriving considerable satisfaction from the expressions of horror, pity, and surprise, that flitted in succession across the fair faces of the listeners.

"And so you escaped unhurt!" exclaimed Bianca, clasping her hands—with delight I was fain to suppose.

"Quite, signora; you observe my thick glove, and the curb rein"—

"And the bearer—the poor Frenchmen!" said Luisa, fixing her blue eyes upon me.

"Escaped, I am now happy to say. Poor fellow! 'tis said he was Regnier's son."

"Philippe Regnier! O, my God!" murmured Luisa in a breathless voice.

"Luisa!" exclaimed Bianca, surveying her pale features with astonishment. The poor girl blushed deeply, and bent over her embroidery-frame, adding, in a faltering voice, that she herself was soon to behold such scenes, and looked forward to them with horror.

"True, Luisa, dear," said Bianca, kissing her cheek, "You set out with your father for our army at Cassano to-morrow."

"To join the chiefs of the Masse?" I asked. Luisa Gismondo bowed, and the subject was abruptly changed. I saw that some secret was labouring in her breast, causing a dejection and confusion she could ill conceal.

But to proceed briefly. The acquaintance that Bianca and I had formed in Sicily was fast ripening, and we became as intimate as cousins, and quite as harmless in our flirtation. Swiftly and happily passed that agreeable evening, in the course of which I discovered that the minds of these fair girls were no way inferior to the perfection of their persons. Their manners were animated and bewitching, their imaginations brilliant; each was mistress of music and drawing, and well read in the best works of Italian literature. We commented on the "Giuletta" of Captain Luigi da Porta—that brave cavalry officer, who wielded his pen in peace as well as he had done the sword in the wars of the league of Cambray and the campaigns of Gradiska, and from whose pathetic novel, Shakspeare derived the plot of his far-famed tragedy. We also dipped into the "Gierusalemme" of Tasso, and wooed the softer muse of Petrarch. Then Luisa seated herself at the piano, and, with Bianca, sang a beautiful duet from the "Antonio e Cleopatra," of the amorous Vittorio d'Alfieri, whose genius enriched and invigorated the literature of his country. Bianca showed me her portfolio, wherein I sketched the distant hills of Maida, as seen from the casement, shining in all the silvery blaze of an Italian moonlight: next came her collection of medals and bronzes; and her music, including the last new piece from Palermo. Her lap-dogs, parrot, and heaven knows what besides, were all separately admired, while the general, his despatch, and the service, were alike forgotten.

The boudoir was a charming little place, elegantly fitted up, and decorated with every ornament that her own taste or her cousin's wealth could procure; and the cool sea-breeze wafted the aromatic perfumes of the garden through the open

casements. The broad moon was shining on the glassy deep, and we heard the solemn hymn of the Sicilian fishermen, and the dipping of oars, as they fell in measured time into the sparkling waters of the gulf.

The sullen toll from the clock turret in the quadrangle, warned me that it wanted but an hour of midnight. I started up as the forgotten despatch rushed upon my remembrance.

"The deuce!" thought I; "now then to horse, and away."

Bianca set before me in grim array all the dangers of travelling in so wild a country at midnight,—the woods, the marshes, the wolves, the banditti, and begged me to remain at least until her aunt returned with some of the mounted servants. The fine eyes of the lovely and warm-hearted girl became almost suffused with tears, as she presented me with an *Agnus Dei* for Luigi. This was a piece of some unknown stuff cut in the form of a heart, which Frà Adriano had informed her had power to drive away evil spirits, and calm storms and tempests,—having been consecrated by his holiness the pope, who provides an ample supply of these sacred toys for distribution every seven years. Although at that moment I was on the point of leaving her, perhaps for ever, I could not forbear smiling at the credulous superstition, or devout simplicity, which induced her to intrust me, in such sincere good faith, with this gift for her cousin.

"*Felicissima notte*, Signorina Luisa, and happiest night to you, dearest Bianca!" said I, on turning to leave them.

"I would give you such an amulet too," said Bianca, "but 'twere better not: you only scoff at these things, which your erring fathers have taught you to scorn."

"No, dear Bianca; believe me, that any gift—"

"Hush now, Caro Claude!" said she, placing her pretty hand on my mouth; "I will not believe you."

In one short evening, how had the enchanting manner, the gentle tones, and sweet nature of this Italian girl endeared her to me! Until I rose unwillingly to depart, I knew not that the spell she had cast around me was so powerful. My hand trembled; and this sympathetic confusion was conveyed by its touch to Bianca, who blushed and cast down her eyes, while a roguish smile overspread the fair face of Luisa. A love affair makes rapid progress in the fervid clime of volcanoes and earthquakes, though the pathway is too often planted with poniards; and, before parting, Bianca and I had formally exchanged rings. Respectfully pressing my lips to her hand and cheek, I resigned her, in tears, to the tender

solace of Luisa Gismondo, and hastened from the apartment. I led forth poor Cartouche, who had spent the whole night in the dark porch, shaking his ears and snorting with impatience, while the cold night-dew gathered on his glossy coat and glittering harness.

My foot was in the stirrup, when the opening of a window above made me pause, and my fair friends appeared leaning over a balcony.

"Claude," said Bianca! "on the wild hills, above Maida, there dwells an aged hermit, to whom every year we have sent alms,—madonna mia! he is very, very old! My aunt did so when she was a girl, and her mother had done so before her. Tell the good man that I remember him in my prayers, and ask his blessing for Bianca."

"And for me, too, signor," added Luisa.

"I shall not forget, ladies," said I, leaping into my saddle. "Adieu."

In ten minutes the villa d'Alfieri was far behind, and I was galloping along the moonlit Leach of St. Eufemio.

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT WITH THE ZINGARI.

AN hour's hard riding brought me to the skirts of the great forest, so famous as the haunt of wolves and brigands, that I did not feel perfectly at ease in its vicinity, and kept on the alert as I proceeded. On one side stretched away into obscurity the level shore, bordered by the sea, which rolled its sullen waves on the yellow sand, or dashed them in glittering foam against the jutting rocks; on the other, arose the rustling oaks and beeches of the lofty forest, the long, dark vistas and gloomy recesses of which the sun had never penetrated. From the wooded heights I expected every moment to issue the red flash of a rifle, or the glancing weapons and tall conical hats of Francatipa's horde; but I trusted that my character as an Italian ally would gain me some favour with those desperadoes, whose ferocity, strange to say, was often mingled with the highest spirit of patriotism and chivalry.

A dense cloud obscured the radiant moon, casting a long, dark shadow over sea and land, and I missed the beaten track which supplied the place of a road. Presently, Cartouche sank to the girths in a plantation of rice, where he snorted and plunged furiously. By using bridle and spur with the

utmost caution, I extricated him; but he sank again and again, and I had fears of losing my noble grey altogether. A rice-field is little better than a marsh, full of water and holes. I toiled on for half an hour, holding his bridle, and endeavouring to regain the lost road; but every instant we plunged deeper into bogs and pools of stagnant water. At last I regained terra firma, close to the forest, but was exhausted with over-exertion and want of sleep. Then the warnings of Bianca were remembered, and I regretted not having remained all night at the villa.

On the verge of the forest, and close to the preceptory-house of Castelermo,—a ruin overgrown with vine and ivy, and now brilliantly illuminated by the moon, which broke forth with double splendour,—I came suddenly upon a large blazing fire, that lit up the dark arcades of the wood, and hissed as the dew was shaken from the waving branches on the flames. Around it moved a group of people, whom at first I supposed to be brigands, but on nearer approach I found they were Zingari,—a class half gipsies, half robbers; of unknown origin, and speaking Italian, but with an accent peculiar to themselves. Like all the scattered remnants of this mysterious tribe in other countries, the Zingari wander over the face of the land, without possessing any property save the chattels borne in the panniers of their mules and asses. These vagrants are chiefly employed in working on metals, which they manufacture into rude stilettos, buckles, and bodkins; though they live principally by their wits and the nimbleness of their fingers.

On my approach, the male portion of the community snatched up their knives and poles; and a skirmish might have ensued, had not an old man, who appeared to be their capo, or chief, quieted their clamour, and stepped forward to receive me. The gang consisted of twelve men and the same number of women; all of them clad in a gaudy, though miserable manner.

The old Zingaro had a beard like that of a patriarch, and the thick masses of his grizzled hair were confined in a netted bag,—the only covering his head, perhaps, had ever known. His red cotton breeches and deer-skin jacket were worn tatters, and his brawny brown legs were bare below the knee, his feet being encased in sandals, laced with straps above the ankle; a broad belt encircled his waist, and sustained a knife, a flask, a pouch, and a mandolin, which, with a staff, or ashen pole, six feet long, completed his equipment. The younger vagabonds were all attired much in the same manner; their dark glancing eyes, naked limbs and shoulders, wild tangled

hair, and wolf-skin garments, giving them a very savage or satyr-like aspect.

Believing there was no cause to fear these people, and being willing to rest and gratify my curiosity, I dismounted, and returned ceremoniously the greeting of the venerable capo.

"Cross her hand with a ducat of gold, that Zilla may read your fortune, signor gentiluomo!" said a young girl, dancing round me, and snapping her castanets, while a gipsy struck a few notes on a rude guitar, and chanted the Zingaresca. "Touch my hand with gold, and if your love will be successful, I will read it in the stars."

"I would rather have it read from your own bright eyes, my pretty donzella," said I, with a gallant air. This made the eyes of the young rogue with the guitar flash fire; and, on my attempting to take the hand of the girl, she tripped away from me with a demure air of rustic coquetry, which made her look prettier still. Though not tall, she was finely formed; the contour of her head and profile was of classic beauty. Her eyes were darker than any I had ever looked on, and at times they became lustrous with lambent light; and her teeth, white and regular, were unsurpassed in brilliancy, even by those of Bianca. But her face, her arms, and legs—the latter partially displayed by a scanty petticoat—were burned by the sun to a hue considerably darker than the natural olive tint of her race. Her hair was so black, that it seemed of a *blue* tint, where the light struck upon it, and its luxuriant masses were confined by a golden arrow, with an unexpanded bulb, announcing that she was a maiden spotless and free, the *barb* being the sign of betrothal or marriage.

"Gentil signor, for a crown, I will write you a spell that will make all the women love you."

"Benissimo, my girl!" said I, "if only one woman loves me truly"——

"Or seek you a love-potion? or a charm against French bullets?" said a hideous hag, with fierce black eyes, a shrivelled skin, and the aspect of a Hecate.

"Bah!" growled the old Zingaro; "away with you, Zilla—and you, too, good mother! The cavaliere has not come among us to have charms made, or fortunes read; but for a trusty guide, who for a handful of carlini will conduct him through any part of the woods between seas."

"Right, master Zingaro!—a guide is just what I am in search of, to direct me on the Crotona road; at least, so far

as we may go until dawn, when I may see to avoid these cursed rice-fields and quagmires, through which it is no joke to ride in the dark."

"True, signor; you have had a very narrow escape. I remember that in the wet season, when these marshes become lakes, three of Regnier's dragoons, while escorting the famous crook-back, Gaspare Truffi, to the gallows at Montelcone, were cajoled by his oily tongue, and led among the rice-fields yonder, as the shortest way. Via! 'twas the longest road they ever marched—for they are on it yet. Gaspare escaped; but the troopers and their horses sunk for ever in the shifting morass. You may thank those blessed stars that shone so kindly on you; you had perished but for them. Seat yourself on the turf, signor; the Zingari feast when other men sleep, and if you will condescend to partake of our meal"—A bowed assent, and seated myself beside his daughter.

It would have been wiser to have ridden on my way, with or without a guide, rather than have trusted myself in such quarters and company; but the aspect of the whole group was so strikingly romantic, that I was tempted to linger. The red flames of the fire cast fitful and lurid gleams of light on the dark countenances and wild garments of the wanderers, shedding a fiery glow on the rich green foliage of the gigantic oaks and elms, whose gnarled trunks were interlaced with ivy, vine, and olive. No wind poured through the long, still vistas of the forest, whose gloomy recesses were spangled with myriads of fire-flies, flitting like flames of fairy tapers. A mountain torrent was falling near us, and the roaring hiss of the cascade seemed alone to stir the dewy leaves of the umbrageous foliage. The large eyes of the Zingari were glinting in the light, as they stared fixedly on the red embers, or watched the motions of the aged crone who superintended the cooking. The meal—whether late supper or early breakfast, I know not—consisted of sundry portions of roebuck and wild pig, which were broiling and sputtering merrily on the glowing bars of an immense gridiron. To these savoury viands were added cakes of flour, a jar of boiled rice, and a pitcher of the wine of the country. Close by me stood Cartouche, reined up to the lower branch of an oak, his large and prominent eyes glaring in the light of the fire, and his broad, red nostrils quivering as the smoke curled around them.

This was one of those picturesque scenes of service, which are rendered so pleasant by the very contrast they present to others. Two hours before, I had been seated in a superb boudoir, beside Bianca and her friend: now I lounged on the

grass among unshaven thieves and vagrants, who regarded my rich uniform and well-trimmed mustachios with eyes of ill concealed admiration and wonder.

During this midnight revel, the old cape represented the roads about the forest, as being so dangerous, that I resolved to abide with his band until dawn, when he promised to send a guide with me so far as I wished.

"Besides, Eccellenza," he added, "Francatripa's men are in the forest, and you might be in some peril if you fell into their hands alone; while, under my protection, you are safe. I mean not that the noble Francatripa would in person molest you; but there are those in his band who are less scrupulous, and who care not whether a traveller wears the scarlet uniform of Britain, or the blue of my Lord Peppo, especially that crooked fiend, Gaspere Truffi, who, since the massacre of his own gang by the voltigeurs of the marchese di Monteleone, acts as Signor Francatripa's lieutenant."

As daylight could not be far distant, I consented to remain. Rolled up in my cloak, I lay down to sleep by the feet of my horse, while the Zingari, after posting one of their gang to watch, also composed themselves for repose on the green sward.

The novelty of my situation, the character of my companions, and my late happy interview with Bianca, kept floating before me, chasing away sleep, and compelling me for a time to lie awake. I lay watching a gigantic tarantella—a species of spider well known for the venomous nature of its bite—spinning its net of silvery gauze from the branches of the oak above me. But I soon found a more agreeable object for contemplation, in the classic form of Zilla, who lay near me, sleeping on her father's mantle of undressed deer-skin, over which her unbound ringlets rolled in luxuriant profusion. At last I dropped into a half-slumber, but was speedily aroused by something writhing within my cloak. I threw it open, and lo! a bloated viper of enormous size was coiled round my left arm. While I endeavoured in vain to shake it off, an exclamation of disgust escaped me, which awoke the young girl Zilla, who, on beholding my predicament, fearlessly grasped the threat of the venomous reptile, and tossed it with all her strength among the trees. This action recalled the lines in Virgil's *Third Georgic*—

"In fair Calabria's woods a snake is bred,
With curling crest and with advancing head;
Waving he reels, and makes a winding track,
His belly spotted, burnished is his back."

"Signor, do not be alarmed!" said Zilla; "I hope the

horrid thing has not bitten you? Ah, were you to sleep for a single night where I have often slept, in the sedges by the Lake of Lugano, at the base of Mont Salvador, where the surface of the water and all the fields around it swarm with vipers, you would not be so frightened by one."

"I was not frightened, my gentil Zingara, though certainly a little startled."

"Pardon me, Eccellenza—I meant not that; but—but only that I am so happy to have been of service." She paused with something like embarrassment.

She was so beautiful, that I was half ashamed to offer her money; and on my placing a Venetian sequin in her hand, strange to say, it was with the utmost reluctance, and after many a furtive glance at the snoring capo, that this half-clad gipsy girl accepted the gift. So I kissed each of her dimpled cheeks—a soldier-like mode of payment, which she evidently relished much more: the sequin seemed only the bestowal of a charity, but the kiss was a compliment. Her oriental eyes kindled with vivacity and light, equalled only by those of the young Zingaro, her admirer; whom I observed coiled up close by, like a snake in a bush, and watching us with a keen expression of anger and mistrust, that boded me little good-will.

"And so, for this night, I am the rival of a Zingaro—a beggarly gipsy boy!" thought I, resigning myself once more to slumber; "what a dashing intrigue for an aide-de-camp! And yet the girl is pretty enough to turn the heads of our whole mess."

I tossed and turned restlessly on my grassy bed. In vain I invoked sleep; a dreamy sense of danger kept me awake, although I had a long and hard ride before me at daybreak. At last I fell into a dozing stupor, produced by the capo's wine and the dampness of his bivouac.

I was roused to consciousness by a shriek from Zilla—a piercing cry—which brought the whole Zingari on their legs in an instant; and, springing up, I grasped my sabre. The hideous visage of Gaspere Truffi, lit up by the dying embers, scowled at me for a moment, from among the pale green foliage of an orange-tree; we then heard him bounding away with one of his elvish yells of spite and malice.

"Slay him—slay him! O the hideous crook-back," exclaimed Zilla. "Caro signor, I watched while you slept, and saw him stealing near you like a tiger-cat. He had a dagger in his hand, and his look was deadly: I knew his fell intentions."

"Oh Zingari!" shouted the enraged capo; "up Mose

—up Maldo—away—after him with your knives and poles!”

“A hundred ducats for him, dead or alive!” I exclaimed.

“Cowards!” ejaculated the old capo. But no man stirred in pursuit; the lieutenant of Francatripa was not to be pursued and attacked like an ordinary outlaw. The gang hung their heads and drew back.

My exasperation was only equalled by my astonishment at this re-appearance of the hunch-back, who, I had supposed, must have perished in the whirlpool beneath the villa d'Alfieri. My rage was kindled anew by this third attempt to assassinate me; and had he fallen into my hands at that moment, I should certainly have incapacitated him from making another attempt on my life.

As a longer stay with my new acquaintances in such a vicinity seemed likely to be fraught with other troubles and dangers, I mounted and rode off, accompanied by a little boy, the brother of Zilla. To her I tendered my thanks and purse at parting; but what gold could ever repay the debt of gratitude I owed the poor gipsy girl? She had saved my life. I thought less of it then than I have done since; one's existence is in hourly peril when campaigning, and escapes from danger are matters of much less note in warfare than in a time of peace.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNCHBACK AGAIN.

IN a little while day dawned, and all the splendour of an Italian sunrise lit up the scenery. The waning moon shone pale and dim as, fading, it disappeared in the azure sky. From the lofty hills I had a view of the Mediterranean; its bright surface gleamed like a sea of polished glass, throwing out in strong relief the dark frigates anchored in the gulf, the gaudy xebecques with their broad lateen sails, swift feluccas, gared galleys, and a swarm of little coasting vessels. These seas, nevertheless, were at times infested by French cruisers and Algerine corsairs, who, darting from behind some cape or isle, pounced upon the unwary merchantman,—for this tribe of Mussulman pirates had not then been extirpated or subdued.

As I advanced, fields of rice, of Turkey corn, and even sugar-canes, appeared at intervals among the wooded hills; and the roadway was bordered by laurels, myrtles, and mulberry-trees. A few cottages, with picturesque little mills

turned by natural cascades, peeped out from among groves of the orange and plum tree ; and ridgy mountains, over whose tall summits the sun poured down its lustre, bounded the landscape. As the sun ascended higher into the blue vault, and his heat and brilliance increased, the scenery became involved in a hazy silver mist, which floated over the face of nature like a veil of the finest gauze, softening and subduing the vivid and varied tints ; it was denser on the mountains, from whose giant sides vast volumes of white vapour came rolling down, like avalanches, or foaming cascades, into the valleys below.

The wild and rugged nature of the country, and my ignorance of the localities, caused me to progress but slowly. When passing through lonely places, I met more than one scout belonging to various bands of brigands, watching, rifle in hand, among the rocks, and exchanging signals by imitating the scream of the owl, the yell of the lynx, or the caw of the rook ; but they always greeted me by a wave of the hat, and a cry of "A holy day to you, signor !" permitting me to pass without question. In many of these desert places, the wayside was strewn with the dead bodies of French soldiers, who had perished from wounds or exhaustion. By this route some of Monteleone's brigade had retreated, and many of the poor stragglers lay in ghastly groups around the rude wooden crosses (marking the scene of murder), and stone fountains, so common by the roadside in Italy. They had been stripped—and some, perhaps, despatched by the poniards of the plunderers ; many were torn by wild beasts, and all were in a loathsome state of decay, lying unburied, blackening and sweltering under a burning sun.

A long ride over rough ground brought me to Policastro. Wearied with so long a seat on horseback under such intense heat, and feeling a languor caused by the hot south wind which had blown all day, I gladly halted at the first albergo that appeared.

Policastro was all in a bustle ; the people were holding a festival in honour of St. Eufemio, their patron saint. It was with the utmost difficulty I found quarters in a miserable inn, where I fed and dressed Cartouche with my own hands, while such humble fare as the place afforded was in course of preparation.

The signoressa was very sorry,—but the town was in such a bustle, she hoped "eccellenza" would condescend to take what her house afforded—maccheroni, lardo, bread, and fruit with Gioja wine.

"Maladette!" said I, with no very contented air, "let me have the best, signora."

This indifferent repast was soon dismissed, the table cleared, and fruit and wine brought in. Lighting a cigar, I drew a sofa close to the open window, and lounged there, observing the fair, or merrymaking, held in honour of the sainted Eufemio. Laces, silver buttons, ribands, chaplets of beads, knives and bodkins, gaudy pictures of miracles and the Madonna, skins of bucks and wolves, real or imaginary relics of holy personages who died in the odour of sanctity, rags, rotten bones, teeth, and innumerable pieces of the true cross, were offered for sale by various ecclesiastics and pious rogues who kept stalls,—the first for the benefit of the saint, and the last for their own. Warm choke-priest, pastry, and sour wine (the refuse of the convent cellars), were retailed for the same purposes. Flags waved, and garlands and ribands fluttered on every side; bells were tolling, and men carolling, and women and children were dancing and singing round a richly-attired image of Saint Eufemio, as large as life, erected on the identical spot from which that blessed personage ascended to heaven. Dominicans, Minorites, Servites, Trinitarians, Clerks of Madonna, and I know not how many more of the Padri, with shaven scalps, dark cowls, or shovel-hats, clad in sombre tunics girt with cords of discipline, swarmed in the streets.

All this festivity displayed the harmless devotion of the Italian character, and its peculiar superstitions; but among the mountains eastward of the town, I became acquainted with deeds of atrocity which revealed all its blacker traits—its proneness to revenge and bloodshed.

"Love," says a popular writer, "is a fiery and a fierce passion everywhere; but we, who live in a more favoured land, know very little of the terrible effects it sometimes causes, and the bloody tragedies which it has a thousand times produced, where the heart of man is uncontrolled by reason or religion, and his blood is heated into a fever by the burning sun that glows in the heaven above his head." Of this I had many instances during our short campaign among the wild Calabrians.

On entering a little hamlet at the base of the hills which rise between Policastro and Crotona, I found that a marriage had just been celebrated, and all the inhabitants of the place were making merry on the occasion. Rustic tables were spread under the shade of orange-trees, and baked meats, rice, milk, fruit, and other simple viands, were displayed in profusion. The happy peasants welcomed me joyously, and invited me to tarry for a time and partake of the general festi-

tivity. I dismounted, and was led forward by a crowd of rustics to the place of honour, beside the most respected guest—the *parrocchiano*, a venerable and silver-haired brother of San Francesco, who had just united the young couple.

After touching our glasses and tasting the wine, we stood up to observe the dancers, who were performing one of their spirited national measures, to the music of the tabor, the flute, and sampogna. The bridegroom, a stout and handsome woodman, arrayed in gala attire,—a particoloured jacket, scarlet vest, and green breeches, the knees of which, like his conical hat, were gaily decorated with knots of ribands—was dancing with his bride, little dreaming that a malignant rival scowled from the orangery close beside them. As usual, the bride was the object of greatest interest; she possessed beauty of form, delicacy of feature, and a soft, Madonna-like expression of serenity and modesty, which, set off by her smart Italian costume, rendered her quite bewitching. A piece of white linen was folded square on her head, and fell with a fringed edge over her shoulders, half concealing the heavy braids of ebon hair through which shone the gilt arrow, whose bulb would to-morrow be expanded. Large, dark, but down-cast eyes, a small rosy mouth, and dimpled chin, and a beautiful bosom, were among those charms with which the woodman's bride was gifted,—doubtless, her only dower. The old people clapped their hands, while the younger sang her praises, accompanied with the music of flutes and mandolins.

The measure was the provincial *tarantella*,—one which requires the utmost agility, the movements increasing in rapidity as the dance approaches its termination. At the moment when the music was loudest, and the joy of the dancers and revellers at its height, the sharp report of a rifle-shot, fired from the orangery, startled the joyous throng; a wild shrieking laugh was heard, and the unhappy bride fell dead at the feet of her husband!

“*Ahi! madonna mia! la sposa!*” burst from every tongue: then all stood for a moment mute—transfixed with horror.

The woodman uttered a yell of rage and grief, and, unsheathing his knife, plunged into the thicket, with the aspect and fury of a tiger. Then rose shouts of anger.

“Oh, abomination! 'tis Truffi the devil,—Gaspare the hunchback! Malediction and revenge!” The men scattered in pursuit of the assassin, armed with knives, clubs, ox-goads, and such weapons as they could snatch on the instant, leaving the old Franciscan and women on their knees, lamenting over the hapless victim of revenge, thus cruelly cut off when her young and buoyant heart was bounding with love and joy.

"Gaspere!" I ejaculated, leaping on my horse to join in the pursuit; "is this devil everywhere? Can this gnome of the woods be dogging my footsteps? Could this death-shot have been intended for me?"

But the Franciscan informed me that the cripple had been a disappointed suitor, and that, ugly and venomous as he was, this overgrown reptile professed love for the village girl, and had made a solemn vow of vengeance on the woodman. I was exasperated beyond measure at this deplorable outrage, and assisted in the fruitless pursuit as long as it was possible for me to do so, consistently with the general's order. Finding that I had far outstripped the villagers, and was alone among the mountains, I turned my horse's head eastward, and pursued my journey,—not consoled by the recollection that deeds as dark were committed in the wild county of Tipperary, when I was quartered there.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HERMITAGE.

REFLECTING on the recent catastrophe, I rode for some time absorbed in mournful thought, from which I was aroused by the peculiar sound of Cartouche's hoofs ringing on hard pavement. On looking about, and finding that I was riding over some old Roman way, the aged hermit, whom the young ladies had requested me to visit, came to my remembrance, for in answer to my inquiries at Policastro, as to his residence, I had been informed that a causeway of unknown antiquity led to his hermitage.

Evening was fast approaching; and after entering a narrow wooded valley between two lofty hills, I found the gloom increasing rapidly. The clouds, too, were gathering fast; a few large drops of rain plashed heavily on the tossing leaves, while a faint gleam of lightning and the muttering of distant thunder announced an approaching storm. I now looked somewhat anxiously for the dwelling of the recluse; and pursuing the windings of that ancient way—which, perhaps, in former days had echoed to the sandalled feet of Milo's mighty host—I penetrated yet further into the deep valley. Stupendous oaks clothed the darkening hills, and cast a sable and melancholy gloom around. The solitude was awful, the stillness intense, for it was scarcely broken by a brawling torrent, rushing, red and muddy, over a precipice of jagged rock, and resounding in a deep and echoing chasm. Afar o

on the most distant peaks, flickered the blaze of vast furnaces kindled by charcoal-burners; but soon these fires were quenched by the fury of the rising storm, and broad sheets of lightning, with vivid and ghastly glare, lit earth and sky almost incessantly. By the livid flashes, I was enabled to find my way to the hermitage, and pushing forward at full gallop, I gladly reached its welcome shelter.

A rough wooden cross, and a turf-seat beside a rock, from which bubbled a rill into a basin worn by the water (that had fallen for ages, perhaps) on the stones below, answered the description given me of the abode of this recluse of the wilderness. Dismounting, I approached a small edifice of stone, which appeared to be the ruined tomb of some ancient Roman, whose name, once great and glorious, was now lost in oblivion. Its form was square, its size about twelve feet each way, and it had a domed roof of massive stone-work, which was covered with ivy and myrtle, while wild fuchsias and wall-flowers flourished in the clefts and joints of the decayed masonry. Two Roman columns and an entablature, time-worn and mutilated, formed the portico, which was closed by a rustic door of rough-barked wood. On the architrave I could just make out this inscription, cut in ancient characters,

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS :

the wish uttered at the funerals of the Latins, that earth might press lightly on the person buried. I therefore concluded that the edifice had been erected anterior to the custom of burning the dead.

Fastening my horse in a sheltered nook, between the tomb and a rock that rose perpendicularly behind it, I knocked thrice at the door, but not receiving an answer, I pushed it open and entered. The light of a lamp, placed in a recess before an image of the Madonna, glimmered like a star amid the darkness of that dreary habitation, and just enabled me to perceive, on my eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, a most melancholy object, one not unlike that which presented itself to the reprobate Don Raphael and his friend among the mountains of Cuença.

On a bed of leaves and straw, stretched on the paved floor, and clad in the coarse canvas garb of the poorest order of priesthood, lay the venerable hermit. The hand of death pressed heavily on him. His cassock, rent and torn in twenty places, scarcely covered his almost fleshless form, which age, fasting, and maceration had attenuated to a frightful degree. A rusty chain, evidence of some self-imposed penance, encircled his waist; and he convulsively

clasped in his bony and shrunken hands a rosary. Close by, lay an old drinking-horn and a human skull, the latter well polished by long use, and near them lay a handful of chestnuts, the remains of his last repast.

"O thou most adorable Virgin!" he exclaimed, in a feeble but piercing voice, "in this terrible hour intercede for me with Him whom I dare not address, for horribly the awful memory of the past arises at this moment before me! Gesù Christo, hear me! and thou blessed Madonna!"

His voice died away, and I approached gently, removing my hat, on drawing near.

"A foot!" he exclaimed. "Oh, stranger! for the love of mercy, give me a draught of water! Thirst makes me suffer in anticipation those pains which are in store for sinners such as I am!"

His drinking-cup was empty, so I hastened to the brook and filled it with water; the storm was roaring terrifically through the valley at that moment. Hurrying back, I fastened the door, and pouring a few drops of brandy from my travelling-flask into the water, held the cup to the sufferer's lips, who, after drinking greedily, sank again on his couch. A faint flush spread over his death-pale face; he revived rapidly, and endeavoured to raise himself up into a sitting posture, but in vain: nature was exhausted. After trimming the lamp, by its smoky light I took a closer survey of the tomb and its scarcely living tenant. The dismal aspect of the place—its dark walls and darker urn-niches—the feeble light and heavy sombre shadows, together with its wretched inmate, filled me with wonder, disgust, and pity.

The face and figure of the hermit were such as I never saw before, and have never looked on since. He was a very old man—old beyond any one I had ever known; and he seemed to have hovered so long on the brink of the grave—lingering between time and eternity—that he looked (if one may be allowed the expression) a living corpse, almost as much a part of the mart world as of this. The crown of his head was bald, but tangled locks of white hair straggled from his temples, and mingling with his beard, formed one matted mass, white as snow, growing together, and almost concealing his visage, and reaching below his rusty girdle. It gave a patriarchal dignity to his appearance. His keen and sunken eyes gleamed beneath his white and bushy eyebrows, with a most unpleasant expression; like the horrid glare of death, mingling with the restless and rolling glances of insanity.

To disturb him as little as possible by the appearance of an uniform, I wrapped my cloak round me, and seated me

stone near his couch of leaves, waited until he revived so far as to address me. Refreshed by the cool draught, and invigorated by the spirit it contained, his energies were rallying rapidly; yet I did not think he would live out the night. The tempest that raged furiously without, made yet more impressive the silence within the tomb—a silence broken only by the heavy breathing and indistinct muttering of the sufferer.

Sweeping over the drenched wilderness, the rain was peering down like a cascade on the vaulted roof of the catacomb; the swollen torrent roared over the adjacent rocks; the rushing wind howled through the narrow glen, and the woods reverberated the rattling peals of thunder. Ever and anon the electric fluid sheeted the sky with livid flame, showing the dark masses of fleeting vapour, and lighting up the doorway and the broken niche that served for a window, so as to reveal the wild landscape—the woods waving tumultuously like a surge, the strained trees tossing their branches to the blast, and the dark hills beyond, whose peaks the thunderbolts were shattering in their fury.

The storm lulled for a moment; and but for a moment only! Again the rolling thunder pealed, slowly and sublimely in the distance, echoing athwart the vault of heaven like platoons of musketry. The roar of the elements increased as the storm rushed onward, till at length it burst anew over the valley, as if to spend its concentrated fury on that lonely tomb. A succession of stunning reports, each one loud as the roar of a hundred pieces of cannon, shook the dome and the walls of the tomb to their foundations; some fragments of masonry fell to the earth, and I leaped towards the door, fearing to be buried in the falling ruin. But the tomb withstood the bursting tempest, as it had done thousands of others.

The old man, uplifting his clasped hands and gleaming eyes to heaven, shrieked wildly a prayer in Latin. His aspect was awful: he seemed the embodied spirit of the tempest—which now died away more suddenly than it rose. The dust was yet falling from the shaken roof and walls of the tomb when the storm ceased.

"'Twas the voice of God in wrath!" exclaimed the hermit, in a firm and solemn voice. "Stranger, would that thou wert a priest, to implore for me the intercession of the blessed Mary, mother of all compassion! to pray with me in this dread hour. Prayer! prayer! much need have I of prayer, to soothe the terrors of my parting soul!"

I was deeply impressed by this appalling scene. The accents

of the dying man were faltering, and full of anguish, he spoke as if eternity had opened to his mental vision.

"More than a hundred years have rolled away since I first looked on the light of this world—*Miserere mei, Domine!* Sixty years only have I spent in prayer, penance, solitude, and mortification of the flesh, to atone in some degree for the manifold and deadly sins committed while a denizen of the great and wicked community of mankind. You behold a sinner," he continued, his voice rising as he proceeded—"a villain of no ordinary dye! A wretch, whose enormities are greater than sixty years of piety and repentance can atone for; long though they have been. Centuries seem to have elapsed since this dismal tomb of the wilderness first became the witness of my secret sorrow—since I last heard the din of the bad and busy world! How many of the brave, the beautiful, and the innocent have been gathered to their fathers in that weary time! Generations have been born, have lived their allotted span, and been called to their last account; yet this guilty head has been spared. Memory, with all its goading torments, has never left me; though the torpid apathy of age and a life of solitude—sixty slowly passing years spent in brooding over past horrors, and the crimes of early days—have worn and withered to the core, a heart which for swelling pride and ferocity had not its equal in Italy. Who would think *this* hand had ever grasped a sword?"

He laughed like a serpent hissing, and thrust before me his right hand; lean, bony, and wrinkled, the large joints protruded beneath the thin, shrivelled skin, which revealed every vein, muscle, and fibre. His skeleton form was so covered with hair, that he resembled an overgrown baboon; and as he regarded me with a wild and intense stare, his red and sunken eyes sparkled like those of a Skye terrier through the tangled bush of white locks overhanging them.

"Men say I have been mad!" he continued: "I might well have been so, if bodily torture and mental agony, incessant and acute, can unseat the lofty mind which alone makes man godlike. In this dread hour, the memories of other years—deeds of anger and crime, thoughts of sorrow and remorse—come crowding fast upon me! *O miserere mei, Domine!*" He seemed talking to himself rather than to me, and often pressed his bony fingers on his sharp angular temples, as if trying to arrange the chaos of recollections.

"Blessed be Madonna, that she sent a fellow-mortal to witness these last agonies—to behold the deathbed of a sinner! Let its memory be treasured up in your heart—profit by it

my son ! One death-scene such as this is better than a thousand homilies."

(*This to me, who but two days before had ridden through the carnage of Maida!*)

"You are young, and I am old, my son—old in years, and older still in sin ; yet say, think you there is any hope for me ? In another hour I shall have passed from this transient life to that which is eternal. What will become of my soul ? Will He consume me in his wrath ? O Spirito Santo, thou alone canst answer ! I behold that flaming abyss of everlasting misery and woe, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Is that my doom ? *O miserere mei, Domine !* Mercy ! pity me ! speak !"

While raving thus, he clasped my feet with the energy of despair ; his whole frame shook with excess of spiritual terror, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. Deeply moved, I heard him in silence, not knowing what to reply. A long pause ensued.

"Holy father !" said I, when the paroxysm had passed away, "there is hope in the mercy of Heaven even for the vilest, how much more for one who has passed so holy a life as you !"

"Alas ! alas !" he exclaimed, beating his breast, "thou knowest me not, my son ! And the simple peasantry who regard me as a saint—even like the holy Gennaro—know me not !"

"Whatever may be those crimes, the recollection of which so haunts you, let us hope that remorse and sincere repentance——"

"Blessed words ! You say truly, my son ! Remorse and repentance will do much ; but a load of guilt weighs heavy upon my soul. I would fain unburthen my conscience to thee, my son ; though the recital of my iniquities might freeze the marrow in your bones. Receive my last confession, I beseech thee ; for I would not go down to the grave with the reputation of a saint ; which, though given me by many, I merit so little !"

Again he drank thirstily ; and raising himself into a half-recumbent posture, prepared to make that revelation for which my excited curiosity longed so impatiently. He was rallying rapidly ; his voice became fuller, and his enunciation more distinct and connected. He clutched my arm with an iron grasp, and his bleared and hollow eyes glittering with excitement, glared into mine with a searching and intense expression, which made me feel very far from comfortable.

"You would preach to me words of peace and consolation

—peace to a tempest-tossed heart—consolation to a soul torn with anguish and remorse! You bid me hope! Listen, then, to what mortal ears have never heard—the long-concealed secret of my life—the crimes of my heedless youth, and the sorrows of Diomida; who, perhaps, from the side of Madonna in heaven, beholds this scene to-night.”

Gathering all his energies, the aged recluse commenced the following narration, in the solemn subdued tone of a contrite sinner recounting his misdeeds; recalling with a vividness that seemed preternatural in one so near his end, the history of his youth.

His narrative was often interrupted by pauses, bursts of sorrow, and groans of remorse, exclamations of pity and horror, pious ejaculations, and prayers for mercy.

Exhausting as this suffering and exertion must have been, he seemed to gain strength as he proceeded; as if all his powers returned to accomplish this last effort; so the flame of the expiring lamp burns bright for a moment ere it is extinguished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HERMIT'S CONFESSION.

Of all the nobles of Venice, none enjoyed a more general and deserved popularity than Giulio count della Torre di Fana. The gayest and most gallant of cavaliers, loved by his friends and respected by his enemies, he was the star of the senate, and idol of the people. His wife was beautiful and virtuous; his estates were among the richest, his palaces the most superb, his stud the most fleet and graceful, his assemblies and gondolas the most elegant, and his galleries the most magnificent in Venice! What more was wanting to make him the happiest man in Italy?

At the age of twenty, Count Giulio espoused Diomida, the niece of John di Cornaro, the venerable doge, then in the 84th year of his age; preferring her to an heiress of the powerful house of Strazoldi, to whom he had been in childhood betrothed. Diomida was then in her seventeenth year, and her beauty, not less than her exalted rank, made her the first lady in Venice. Her mind was not inferior to her charms, which were such as man rarely looks on. O Diomida! even at this distant time, when the silent tomb has so long closed over thee—aye, even now, when looking back through the long, dark vista of years of horror, I can recall to memory thy lovely sweetness and majestic beauty,—true

attributes of thy blood and high descent, which made thee the noble glory of Venetians!

For a time after his marriage, no man was happier than Count Giulio, and no woman more loving or beloved than Diomida. Proud of each other, their mutual tenderness and devotion appeared to increase every day, and their happiness became a proverb among their friends. If the count returned ruffled in temper by losses at the gaming-table, by debates in the senate, by any obstruction opposed to the passage of his gondola on the canal, or his train on the steps of the Rialto, the soft voice and gentle smile of Diomida were sure to soothe his fiery spirit,—which was easily chafed by trifles into a fury. At the sound of her voice, or the pressure of her little hand, the gloom vanished from his haughty brow, and the annoyance was forgotten; Diomida was formed for love and delight, and anger fled from her presence. The count doted on the noble girl whom he had taken to his bosom, and enthroned in his palace; his affection had no equal save her own. His innocent bride was supremely happy,—giddy with joys that were too bright to last. She saw not the storm that was gathering in the distance, and which, urged by the power of her evil genius, was so soon to overwhelm her.

The young count di Strazoldi—who had been serving under Zondadari, grand master of Malta, and had gained considerable renown in the war against the Ottoman Porte—arrived in Venice, six months after Giulio, at the altar of *Sta. Maria della Salute*, had placed on the bright tresses of Diomida that coronet which ought to have adorned the sister of Strazoldi.

Like all the Venetian nobles, the count di Strazoldi was fierce, haughty, and infatuated with his family rank; and being naturally of a libertine disposition, his residence among the knights of *San Giovanni*—whose loose mode of life is proverbial—did not improve his morals. The wild cavaliers and reckless military spirits with whom he had associated, in the garrisons of *La Valetta* and *Melita*, had altogether destroyed the little sense of honour which a Venetian education had left uncorrupted; and he returned a perfect devil in heart, though assuming the frank air of a soldier, and the graceful manners of an accomplished cavalier. When flushed with wine, however, his features had a stern expression, and his restless eyes a daring look, that quiet men shrunk from; and he then looked more like a debauched and brutal brave than a polished Venetian gentleman.

Lucretia, his sister, to whom *La Torre* had preferred the gentle and timid Diomida, was the most imperious and haughty signora in the duchy,—notwithstanding the exquisite

softness imparted to her brilliant charms by the Lombardo blood of her race. Fired at the preference of La Torre for the beautiful Cornaro, her love turned to the deadliest hatred, and she demanded of her brother Stefano to challenge La Torre to a duel on the Rialto. But Count Strazoldi was tired of fighting; he had seen enough of it under the banner of Malta, and in the valley of the demons in Sicily, under the marquis de Leda, and was not disposed hastily to enter into this feud at the behest of his incensed sister.

"Patience and peace," said he, with a grim smile, "I will anon avenge you more surely and amply."

He had met the count della Torre at the Dogale palace, at the gaming-houses, and other public places, and found him a gay, agreeable young man, upon whose generosity and frankness of heart he had little doubt of imposing; and from whose princely revenue he hoped to repay himself for the ducats he had squandered in the Turkish wars, and among his wild companions at Malta and Gozzo. The count della Torre was in turn pleased with the gay and fashionable manners of the hollow-hearted Stefano Strazoldi,—who first gained his esteem by losing some hundred sequins with an air of unconcern, and performing a few pretended acts of friendship. Strazoldi afterwards won the admiration of Della Torre, by relating the battles, sieges, and fierce contests by sea and land in which he had borne a conspicuous part, whilst serving under Zondodari and the grand cross Antonio Manuel de Vilhena, who, on the death of the former, succeeded him in the office of grand master.

Although La Torre made a constant companion of the dissolute Stefano, and dissipated his patrimony in gay entertainments, he had more prudence than to invite him to his palace. His unhappy countess mourned in loneliness the sad change in the manners of her husband,—who, led astray from the path of honour, spent whole days at the gaming-house, and nights at the café or the cantina. He associated also with other reckless spirits, to whom Strazoldi introduced him, in visiting those thrifty mothers who had rising families of daughters, and who were anxious to procure them dowries according to the infamous custom of that abandoned city. In short, Count Giulio was no longer the same man he had been, and days passed without his crossing the threshold of his wife's apartment. Poor Diomida! this terrible change sank deeply in her heart. When during the day her husband at times visited the palace, it was only to extort money from his terrified steward, who warned him in vain that the splendid revenue of his estates was miserably impaired. But palled

with excesses, jaded in spirit, and morose with losses, such answers only chafed the count into a tempest of rage; and the steward was glad to raise the gold, by having recourse to Isaac, the famous Jew-broker on the Rialto.

Seldom now did he look on the pale face of his once-loved Diomida, whose silent sorrow—she was too gentle to upbraid—passed unheeded. Her grief was increased to agony when she learned that in the society of her dangerous rival Lucretia, the count now spent the most of his time; the passers-by shrugged their shoulders when they beheld the vast façade of the palazzo della Torre so silent, gloomy, and dark—having the air of a deserted mansion—while the gorgeous palazzi of the Strazoldi, the Cornaro, the Balbi, and other nobles, were blazing with light, and brilliant with festive assemblies.

One evening, full of sad thoughts, Diomida sat in her boudoir alone; alas! she was now seldom otherwise. Her cheek was pale; the slight roseate tinge that once suffused it had fled, and the lustre of her eye had faded. Long weeping and pining in secret were destroying that fresh bloom which rendered her the most admired of all Venetian beauties, and the pride of the venerable doge, her uncle. Her books, embroidery, and guitar were all neglected; and she sat moodily in her dimly-lighted room, watching in despairing anxiety for the tread of her husband (whom for four days she had not seen), and weeping for the past joys of their early marriage days.

As she listened, step after step rang in the adjacent streets, and heavy spurs jangled beneath the paved arcades; other men were passing to their homes, but the count returned not to his; and the thoroughfares gradually became silent and empty. The clock in the marble cupola of Santa Maria tolled the hour of midnight, and the countess bowed down her fair head in wretchedness: she knew that her husband would be absent for another night, and she would rather have known that he was dead than in company with her triumphant rival, or damsels of still more doubtful fame. She was about to summon her attendants previous to retiring, when the dash of oars broke the silence of the canal, and a gondola jarred with hollow sound on the steps of Istrian marble, leading from the portals of the palace. A flush of hope glowed on the pallid cheek of Diomida, and listening intently, she pressed her hand on her fluttering heart. In breathless expectation she paused, listening to the measured tread of manly footsteps approaching, marked by the ring of silver spurs on the tessellated floor of hall and vestibule, and a

sword clattering in unison, as the wearer ascended the left stairs by three steps at a time. A hand cased in a long, buff glove drew back the ancient hangings of the doorway—

"Giulio! Giulio—beloved one—you have not quite forgotten me!" exclaimed Diomida, in piercing accents, as she sprang forward to embrace her truant husband. She was caught in the arms of Stefano Strazoldi!

"Excellent, my beautiful idol!" he exclaimed, pressing the sinking girl to his breast; "you are somewhat free for a doge's niece, but not the less welcome to a joyous cavalier, tired of the timid Ionian girls, and copper-coloured nymphs of Malta, with their cursed Arabic tongues!" and he laughed boisterously. His broad-plumed hat placed on one side of his head, revealed the sinister aspect of his face, now flushed with wine and premeditated insolence; his cloak, doublet, and rich sword-belt were all awry, and Diomida beheld with dismay that he staggered with intoxication.

"I thought you were the Count Giulio, my husband," said Diomida, shrinking back with horror; for she could not look upon Strazoldi, the destroyer of her domestic peace, otherwise than as an accomplished demon.

"Unhand me, my lord!" she added indignantly. "I am a lady of noble birth, and shall not be treated thus with impunity!"

"Nay!" exclaimed Stefano; "do not ruffle your temper, sweet lady: our married dames of Venice heed little when their cheeks are pressed by other lips than those of their liege lords. Why, my beautiful idol! thou art as coy and enchanting as Elmina la Mondana, the fairest priestess of Venus——"

"Infamous!" exclaimed the struggling countess, trembling with terror and indignation. "Darest thou name such in my presence?"

"Aye, in presence of Madonna; and why not to thee?"

"I am the daughter of Paolo Cornaro, the first of our Venetian cavaliers, before whose galley the bravest ships of the Mussulmen have fled. Alas! were he now alive, I had not been thus at thy mercy! Unhand me, Count Strazoldi! Away, ruffian——"

"The prettiest little chatterbox in Venice!" said the count gaily. "But enough of this! Know that your loving lord and master has assigned you to me, for the sum of three thousand sequins, fairly won from him an hour ago at cards, in the house of the Mondana; therefore art thou mine, signora, as this paper will testify." The swaggering libertine grasped firmer the shrinking girl with one hand, while with the other he displayed a paper, to which she saw with horror Giulio's

name attached. A glance served to inform her that the contents were such as her assailant had described them to be. La Torre, intoxicated with wine, and maddened by losses, had staked and lost his beautiful wife for the sum of three thousand sequins, to his reckless companion; who, hurrying away from the side of La Mondana, threw himself into his gondola, and reaching the palace of the countess, had ascended to her apartment by the private stair, the key to the entrance of which he had obtained from the depraved husband. Diomida trembled with shame and indignation, and would have swooned; but the revolting expression in the gleaming eyes of Strazoldi, inspired her with the courage of desperation; she shrieked wildly, invoking the Madonna to protect her, as Stefano, inflamed by her beauty, and encouraged by her helplessness, was proceeding to greater violence.

"Peace, pretty fool," he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "or I will twist this scarf round your throat, as I have done to many a less noisy damsel in the land of the Turk and Greek. Sformato! have I not gained you fairly at *faro* from your husband, and offered him my sister Lucretia in exchange? Silence, woman! wouldst thou force me to gag thee with my poniard! Beware, 'tis of Campoforte." The ruffian laughed fiercely, and grasped her with a stern air of determination, while she redoubled her despairing cries for assistance. But, alas! the palace was empty now; and the few attendants sleeping in the basement heard her not. She was about to sink from exhaustion, when steps were heard springing up the private staircase. She exclaimed with passionate joy—

"'Tis the count! 'tis my husband! O Giulio, save your once-loved Diomida, before she expires at your feet!"

It was not La Torre, but a tall and richly-clad cavalier, wearing the uniform of the Dalmatian guards, and having a black velvet mask on his face, as if he had just left a masquerade.

"Draw, Count Stefano! Ungallant ruffian! whose vices in peace obscure all the brilliant feats performed in war. Defend yourself."

Strazoldi drew promptly, while Diomida, overcome, sank upon a sofa almost lifeless.

Fierce was the conflict that ensued between the cavaliers, who were both armed with those long narrow-bladed and basket-hilted rapiers, then usually worn by Italian gentlemen. Strazoldi, brave to excess, fought as resolutely in a bad cause, as he could have done in a good one, and the stranger was compelled to put forth his best skill. Both were perfect masters of their weapons; but Strazoldi had youth and agility

in his favour. While his antagonist managed his sword with all the stern deliberation and coolness of a practised duellist, the fierce Stefano lunged forward, thrusting furiously, until by a sudden circular parry, his weapon was struck from his hand, and whirled up to the frescoed ceiling. His adversary rushed upon him, beat him to the floor, and placing a foot upon his neck, commanded him to ask pardon or die.

"Of the countess I ask pardon most assuredly, but not of you!" replied the vanquished libertine, panting with rage. "Strike, whoever you are! Stefano di Strazoldi—who has ridden through the thickest battalions of the Turks, and planted the standard of Manuel de Villena on the summit of the Castello Rosso—will never ask mercy of mortal man!"

"I esteem you brave among all the nobles of Venice; and, reckless libertine and ruffian as you are, would regret to slay you. Once more, I ask will Count Stefano of Strazoldi yield?"

"Never!"

"Not to *me*?"

"No; not were you the doge himself."

"That shall be proved," replied his conqueror, removing his velvet mask, and revealing the noble features of the venerable John Cornaro; his brow contracted and stern, and his large dark eyes flashing with anger and indignation.

"Oh, spare him, spare him, guilty though he be!" exclaimed the countess.

"You know me, Count Strazoldi, and will not scorn to beg life as a boon at the hand of your doge?"

"Doge or devil! Di Strazoldi will never submit to any such humiliation," replied the reckless cavalier, startled, but not abashed, on discovering his conqueror to be the illustrious uncle of Diomida. "Strike! illustrissimo, but keep me not in a position so degrading!"

Cornaro raised his hand, yet stayed the impending thrust, and spared his adversary.

"Rise, signor; receive your sword, and learn to use it in a better cause than the defence of guilt and outrage. Rise and begone! John Cornaro can respect bravery even in a ruffian. Away! but remember this affair ends not here. Both with Count Giulio and yourself a stern reckoning must be made. I swear by San Marco! that this right hand, which never suffered insult to pass unrevenged or wrong unpunished, shall, without appeal to council or to senate, redress most amply the outrage offered to the child of my brother. Wretch! save such as you, every man in Venice would have respected the daughter of Paolo Cornaro, the bravest admiral

that ever led the fleets of our republic to battle. Begone to the infamous Giulio! You know his haunts, at the house of Signora Elmina, or any other bordello, where he wastes his ducats and his days. Let him know of this night's work, and tell him to dread the vengeance of John Cornaro!"

Strazoldi retired covered with confusion. The tall and imposing form of the venerable doge, whose breast swelled with anger, and whose eyes kindled with indignation, made him quail. Fierce and profligate as he was, Stefano knew that he was wrong; and his natural effrontery failed him before the virtuous wrath of the incensed doge, whose generosity added a sting to this stern rebuke. Leaving Diomida, who had swooned, to the care of her women, Cornaro departed; resolving to call the count della Torre, and his unworthy cousin Strazoldi, to a severe account at a future time. But the doge returned to his palace only to sicken and to die; the excitement of that night's conflict caused a relapse of a dangerous illness, which ultimately carried him to the grave. Of that more anon.

From that time the dissolute husband of Diomida gave himself up to the most licentious excesses; setting no bounds to his desires and outrages: his days were consumed in *ennui* and gloom, the nights were spent in carousal and riot. When he promenaded the streets, or his swift gondola shot through the canals, all women of modesty shrunk from his gaze, and drew down their veils; while noble cavaliers pitied the wild young profligate who was rushing headlong to ruin, dissipating a princely patrimony, and blighting the ancestral honours of a noble name.

Giulio now shunned entirely the presence of the heart-broken Diomida, though often his palace resounded with the noise and tumult of reckless companions, the principal of whom was his evil genius Count Strazoldi.

It was rumoured in Venice that the beautiful, but vicious Lucretia, had too readily favoured the addresses of Count Giulio, and that her brother had been rendered both blind and dumb by a present of many thousand sequins. Their amours were the common topic of the day, and ribald improvisatori of the lowest class sang of their intrigues to the rabble on the Rialto, the Piazza of St. Mark, and all the public places of the city. Poor Diomida clasped her hands, and prayed to heaven for succour when she heard of these things; she was sinking fast, yet still fondly hoped that Giulio might see the error of his ways, and learn to love her as of old.

Could the wretched count have beheld his pale and suffering wife during one of her many dreary hours of silent and lonely

anguish, his heart, unless lost to every sense of honour, must have been wrung within him; he would have been struck with remorse to behold the misery he had wrought for one so young and so beautiful—so loving and so patient; an angel of heaven, compared with the demon of wickedness to which he had transformed himself.

But the count never saw her now. With his cousin, the abandoned Lucretia, and her equally abandoned brother, or with Elmina la Mandona, the most beautiful courtesan in Venice, he lived a life of debauchery and extravagance, till his coffers were drained, his retinue dismissed, his horses sold, and his estates, pictures, libraries, jewels, and plate had all melted away like snow in the sunshine. The grass grew in the stable court, where the stall collars of sixty steeds had rattled in his father's days; weeds and flowers flourished on the palace walls without, and spiders spun their webs undisturbed on the gilded columns and gorgeous frescoes within; even the once gay gondola, that bore the crest of his house on its prow, lay unused and rotting in the Grand Canal. His exhausted finances would not now admit of his giving splendid entertainments to gay beauties at their own houses, or musical fêtes on the moonlit water; he no longer reclined in glittering gondolas, gorgeous with rich hangings, resplendent with the perfume of flowers, and ringing with laughter, the music of lutes, and the voices of Elmina and her companions, as they glided along the winding canals of Venice, after every other sound in the city was hushed.

After an absence of some months from his home, the count one night returned; but how accompanied? He brought with him Elmina, and a troop of her companions, who again filled the once desolate palace with riot and disorder, and penetrating even to the private apartments of the unhappy countess, insulted her so grossly, that she rushed out in sorrow and terror into the streets.

"O, Girolamo, my brother, hadst thou been here, instead of sleeping on the field of Francovilla, thy unfortunate sister had not been brought to this!" was the exclamation of the poor wanderer, as she abandoned her once happy home at midnight, and, accompanied only by one aged domestic, set out for Nuovale, the last of their country villas which the spendthrift had left unsold.

She might have complained of her wrongs to the good doge her uncle; but he was bowed down with sickness, age, and infirmities, brought on by his wounds received in the wars of the republic, and increased by troubles arising from the intrigues of proud and plotting Venetian nobles. She wished

not to add to his distress by a recapitulation of her own; but hoped that, by suffering in silence, time would bring about a change, for she yet cherished the idea that her still-loved Giulio might again return her affection. But, alas for Diomida! time brought no change to happiness for her.

Forgotten and forsaken, she lived in the utmost seclusion and retirement; while her husband continued his career of riot, gaiety, and dissipation at Venice, with his cousin Lucretia. That most beautiful but abandoned woman, seemed to rejoice in thus openly triumphing over her married and virtuous rival; but her wicked ends were not yet accomplished. She had long resolved that Diomida should be destroyed, and that the count should become her own: a terrible climax was fast approaching.

It was soon whispered abroad by the scandalous tale-bearers of the city, that for most imperative reasons, the Signora Strazoldi had retired to a solitary villa on the Brenta, accompanied by her mother, the old countess; who in her younger days had been equally infamous for her intrigues and dissipated life. Meanwhile Count Stefano, to preserve appearances, challenged Della Torre to a duel in the Piazza of St. Mark at noon. But other means were to be taken, and the cavaliers never came to the encounter.

Bewitched by the beauty of the artful Lucretia, tormented by her tears and reproaches, and stung by the taunts of her mother, and the threats of the boisterous and fierce Stefano, Count Giulio thirsted, with all the avarice of a miser, to replenish his exhausted exchequer with the yet unimpaired fortune of his cousin. Yielding to all these baneful impulses, he concerted the destruction of the unhappy Diomida; sinking his soul yet deeper in misery and crime. The honour of the Signora Lucretia was to be fully restored on her public espousal by the count della Torre. Descended from one of the most ancient of the twelve electoral families, he now found himself obliged to wed a daughter of his uncle by marriage, who ranked only in the third class of the Venetian nobility, and whose name had been enrolled in the "Golden Book" for a few thousand sequins, required in some of the pressing emergencies of the republic.

It was arranged that the young countess should be murdered while her uncle John Carnaro, laid on a couch of pain and sickness, was unable to avert or avenge her fate. Elmina la Mondana was employed by Count Giulio to be the assassin, and she departed from Venice with ample bribes and instructions from Lucretia and her mother. Accompanied by Count Stefano, she reached Nuovale in disguise, and was introduced

alone into the sleeping apartment of Diomida, when the latter was preparing to retire to bed. The aspect of this fair young girl—perishing under the lingering agony of a breaking heart and a wounded spirit, tortured by the reflection of a life lost and a love misplaced—raised no pity in the bosom of the cruel Mondana, who marked, with heartless exultation, that the roundness of the stately form of the wronged wife was gone, her cheek pallid as death, and her eyes glassy and colourless.

"Pity me, gracious countess!" whined the treacherous Mondana, grasping a concealed pistol, while she bowed humbly before her victim; "I am a poor woman whose husband was a trooper, and served under the brave Girolamo Cornaro, in the wars of the count di Merci, and was slain in battle by his side on that unhappy day in the Val di Demona."

"Poor woman!" said the countess, touched by her tears; "and what would you with me?"

"Charity, if it please you, gracious lady. I have heard that none sue a boon in vain of the beautiful Diomida, whose heart is so compassionate."

"I have had more than my own share of woe in this bad and bitter world, even though I have barely seen my eighteenth year," replied the poor girl, sighing deeply, with an air of pity and dejection that would have touched the heart of any one not wholly depraved. "All who have served with my beloved Girolamo, on that fatal field, are welcome to me. And so you say your husband was a trooper, poor woman?"

"A soldier who did good service against the enemy, as this letter from the Colonello Cornaro to the count di Merci can sufficiently prove."

"For my brother's sake, I will cherish the memory of this poor Italian soldier, and befriend thee as his widow. Rest this night at the villa Nuovale, and to-morrow you shall be properly provided for. Meanwhile, I would fain look on the letter of my brother Girolamo." Throwing on her laced night-robe, and confining within a gauze caul the luxuriant tresses of her golden hair, the unsuspecting girl drew near a lamp to peruse the pretended letter; when Elmina, taking advantage of the moment, levelled a pistol at the gentle head of Diomida, and fired. But the muzzle dropped, and the ball passed through the body of the countess, who sank at the feet of her murderess with a shriek, while her life blood flowed in a crimson current, deluging the beautiful bosom, whiter than marble of Paros.

Struck with horror the moment she committed this fright-

file. Elmina fled to her guilty paramour, Count Stefano, who had been watching impatiently beneath the window of this apartment. On learning that Diomida was only wounded, he rushed up stairs to complete her destruction; and in a transport of infuriated malignity, stabbed her with his poniard, until her bosom became a shapeless mass, so horribly was it mangled.

Masked like a bravo, with his broad hat flapping over his eyes, Stefano cut his way through those whom the uproar had assembled, and who, though disposed to bar his passage, shrank from his bloody hand and formidable figure. He rejoined Elmina, whom he also destroyed by a blow of his poniard, to prevent her betrayal of him; and after flinging her body into the Brenta, which flowed past the walls of Nuovale, he was conveyed back to Venice in a gondola. To Giulio and his accomplices at the palace of Strazoldi, he displayed his bloody poniard and the marriage ring of Diomida, as tokens that she was now no more. Then, for the first time, was the conscience of Count Giulio touched with compunction at the sight of that little golden symbol; his mind reverted in agony to the hour of his espousals before the altar of Santa Maria, when he had placed this ring on the finger of Diomida, his loving and beloved bride. How had he fulfilled the solemn vow of those nuptials?

But the deed was done, and the wedding-ring of Diomida glittered in the hand of her relentless rival; who regarded it with eyes which, bright and beautiful though they were, sparkled with triumphant malice and revengeful joy.

"The ring is here, and we want but the priest to mumble Latin and so finish the night with a proper bridal," said the ruffian Stefano, in tones husky with fatigue, as he quaffed a sparkling draught of wine. Giulio felt a stifling sensation in his throat, and his heart beat wildly.

"Think you, I will be wed with the ring of Diomida Cornaro?" exclaimed Lucretia, scornfully. "Perish the bauble with the hand that wore it!" and thus saying she cast the trinket into the canal that flowed dark and silently beneath the windows of the palace. The fair image of his gentle wife rose vividly before Count Giulio at this moment, and he shrank with loathing from the side of Lucretia; regarding her brother with a horror which he could scarcely repress, as his hand involuntarily sought the hilt of his poniard.

Strazoldi noted his agitation, but knowing that taunts or threats would only be fuel to the fire that was smouldering in his heart, he called for wine; and Giulio drank deeply to drown remembrance. The juice of the grape, and the caresses

of the fascinating Lucretia, soon made him forget for a time; and the night was given to revelry, and the formation of plans to cast the guilt of Diomida's murder on the banditti of the hills or the braves of Venice. But they were miserably deceived.

Morning came, and with it horror, dread, and doubt—to the unhappy Giulio at least; his cousin and adviser, Count Stefano, was a villain too hardened to feel compunction at having murdered a woman whose life was an obstacle to the accomplishment of any purpose of his. Morning came, and rumour with her thousand venomous tongues had poisoned the ears of all Venice with the hideous tidings. The church Della Salute was hung with black, the bells of San Marco tolled a knell, and the banner bearing the winged lion of the republic hung half-heisted on the ramparts of the ducal palace.

That night a gondola cleft the bright waters of the Canal di Giudecca, conveying the terrified and guilty fugitives from Venice; gold strengthened anew the arms of the sturdy gondolieri, as they tore on through the foaming sea. Meanwhile, an enraged mob had given the palaces of counts della Torre and Strozzi to the flames; a lurid light from these blazing piles shone on the domes and spires of Venice, on the long lines of magnificent edifices, and the canals that wind between them. As the hum of the multitude died away on the night wind, and the fugitives saw the city grow dim and vanish behind the northern islets of the Lagoon, their guilty hearts beat less fearfully. Lisansar received them, and the heads of their fleet Barbary horses were turned towards the Austrian frontier; that day they rode sixty miles without drawing bridle. They forced their horses to swim the Piove and Livenza, even though the deep broad currents of these rivers were unusually swollen by floods rushing down from the mountains of the Tyrol, laden with shattered pines and terrible with rolling stones and falling rocks. But on—on! was the cry; for fierce pursuers were behind. Fifty cavaliers, the flower of the young nobles, with a squadron of the Dalmatian guard, followed them with headlong speed.

Belgrado and Latisana opened their gates to these guilty ones; but they were still forced to fly, goading on their sinking steeds with spur and poniard. Lucretia and the countess, her mother were faint with fatigue; the horses were failing fast, and the mountains of Carinthia were yet far distant; while the passing breeze brought to their ears the blast of a trumpet; its sound was their knell, for their pursuers kept on their track like Calabrian bloodhounds.

Finding it impossible to cross the frontier, they threw themselves into the tower of Fana, a baronial hold of Count Giulio, near Gradiska, one of the strongest garrison towns in Austrian Friuli. On this impregnable castle, perched on a rock overhanging the fertile valley watered by the Isonza, Giulio hoisted his standard; but his half-Sclavonian, half-German vassals mustered unwillingly beneath it, when they found a siege was to be endured; the cavaliers from Venice, having invested it on every side, resolved to exterminate this infamous family.

Empowered by letters from the doge, the Venetians obtained the assistance of the count di Lanthiri, grand bailiff of Friuli, who raised all his military followers in arms, together with the vassals of the duchy. In addition to these, a regiment of Austrian infantry was brought from Gradiska by its deputy-governor, the brave baron di Fina, knight of Carinthia and the Golden Stole—an order which none but the noblest Venetians wear.

The castle was encircled, and a trench thrown up to cut off all communication with the surrounding country, while a strong force of Austrians guarded the opposite bank of the Isonza, to prevent escape; a needless precaution, as the rock on which the fortress stood descended sheer down to the river many hundred feet below, where foaming over in a white cascade, the stream rushed in boiling eddies round crags and promontories, as it hurried on to hide its waters in the Gulf of Trieste.

Stefano di Strazoldi was roused to the utmost pitch of ferocity of which the peculiarly excitable temperament of an Italian is susceptible, when he beheld the fortress environed: he resolved on a vigorous defence, and resorted to all those military tactics which he had acquired when serving under the grand-master Zondodari. The unhappy Giulio, finding that no alternative was left but to die bravely sword in hand, or perish ignominiously on the scaffold, gathered a fierce courage from despair, and assisted in the defence of the walls with an energy which drew forth many a boisterous exclamation from Stefano, who seemed quite in his element when the castle rocked to its base with the discharge and recoil of its artillery; he swaggered from place to place, blustering and swearing; dividing the time between draining deep flagons in the hall, and urging the defence of the garrison. The sturdy Sclavonian vassals of Fana, though terrified at beholding the displayed standard of the grand bailiff, and seeing that the assailants wore his livery and the Austrian uniform,

fought, nevertheless, with the most resolute valour : as their lord and feudal superior, they deemed the count a greater man than Lanthiri, and with unflinching spirit toiled at the castle guns for four-and-twenty hours. The vassals of the duchy, repulsed and disheartened, were about to abandon their trenches and retreat ; but just then the baron di Fina brought an Italian brigade of artillery against them, and the flagging conflict was renewed with redoubled vigour.

From its rocky base to its frowning battlements, the whole castle was involved in fire and rolling smoke, and the inhabitants of Friuli and Gradiska crowded to the adjacent hills, to behold the unusual scene. Clad in his rich state uniform, a white feather in his hat, and the star of St. George of Carinthia sparkling on his breast, Count Lanthiri led the assailants, and directed their operations. He was mounted on a spotless black horse, and formed a perpetual mark for the cannon and musketry of the besieged. For twelve hours, Di Fina's cannon poured their iron hail against the outer wall till it was breached, and an enormous mass fell with a thundering crash into the Isonza. The Sclavonians then retired with precipitation to the keep ; where they fired from loophole, bartizan, and barricade, with unyielding resolution. The breach being effected, Lanthiri sent forward a trumpeter, who summoned the garrison to surrender ; but, contrary to the usage of war, and regardless of the banner of the duchy which was displayed from the trumpet, Count Strazoldi shot the bearer dead. A tumultuous shout of rage burst from the assailants on beholding the cruel deed.

"Forward, the grenadiers of Gradiska !—Revenge !" exclaimed the grand bailiff, spurring his black horse up the outer breach. "On ! on !—Close up, and fall on. No quarter ! Follow me with bayonet and sabre !"

Regardless of the fire to which they were exposed, and which was strewing the outer court with ghastly piles of killed and wounded, the vassals of the duchy pressed on. The brave old baron di Fina blew open the gate of the keep with a petard, which he hooked to it and fired with his own hand. With a triumphant "viva ;" the soldiers rushed through the opening, where Lanthiri was encountered hand to hand by Count Giulio ; who, forgetting his crimes, gave way to that inborn thirst for blood and conflict which for ages had distinguished his family. The combat was brief. He was borne backwards before the charged bayonets of the Austrians ; while his guilty companion, Stefano, was beaten to the earth, and lost his right hand by a stroke from the baron di Fina's long Italian sword, which was wielded with both hands, and

a terrible execution among the Slavonian vassals of Fana. These infatuated men were appalled by the fall of Strazoldi, whose activity and presence of mind had conspired, more, perhaps, than the count's authority, to animate them during their desperate and rebellious resistance. They were compelled to yield before the headlong rush of their infuriated assailants; and in ten minutes the banner of Count Giulio was pulled down, torn to shreds, and given to the winds; he himself was heavily ironed, and despatched, with his mutilated associate in crime, under an Austrian escort, to the strong citadel of Gradiska; while his castle, lands, and followers, were given up to pillage and devastation by Lanthiri.

During the fury of the siege, the miserable Lucretia, overcome with terror and remorse, and the fatigue of her rapid flight, was prematurely delivered of a son. The fierce Lanthiri, regardless of the tears, sighs, and agony of the desolate mother, ordered the child to be cast into the Isonza; but the more humane di Fina, a veteran of the count di Mercì's wars, directed that the infant should be placed in the monastery of San Baldassare, in Friuli, where there was a lantern for the reception of foundlings.

On finding himself a fettered captive in the gloomy dungeons of Gradiska, Strazoldi became furious with rage and almost insane, through the conflicting emotions of love for his sister, sorrow for her dishonour, and shame for the dark blot which crime had cast for ever on their family name. Cursing Lucretia and her amours, his mother and himself, he tore the bandages from his wounds, and bled to death. Count Giulio, who was confined in the same vault, beheld with stern composure the life-blood of his companion ebbing away, without offering aid. Thus, in a fearful paroxysm of mental and bodily agony, the soul of the fierce Stefano passed into eternity.

Lucretia and her equally wicked mother were placed in a Calabrian convent. Della Torre was ordered by the senate to be brought to Venice, where his name was erased from the pages of the "Golden Book," which contains the arms and names of all the nobles of the state. His participation in the assassination of John Cornaro's niece, and his rebellion against the bailiff of Friuli, were the climax to all his other excesses, which his enemies now exaggerated, until they were regarded as of tenfold enormity. The people, once more rising in a mob, demolished such ruins of his palace as the fire had left; and, tearing the very foundations from the earth, set up instead a column of infamy, to mark the spot to all succeeding ages.

In custody of the common headsman,—a black-rowed ruffian, with naked arms, blood-red garb, and glittering axe,—Della Torre entered Venice; only three days after the venerable Cornaro, weighed down with the cares of state, with age, infirmity, and sorrow, departed in peace at the palace of Saint Mark. His body was embalmed, and laid for the allotted time on a bed of state, covered with cloth of gold, his sword girt on the wrong side, and his spurs having the rowels pointed towards the toes,—such being the usual manner of arraying the doges, when, after death, their bodies are laid out to be viewed by the knights and nobles of the republic.

Forgetful of the illustrious dead, all Venice rang with the shouts of "Hail to the new Doge Alvisio Mocenigo!" provéditeur-general at sea, and commander in Dalmatia, whom the great chancellor was conveying to his coronation. The *mael del Spirito Santo* was sung in the cathedral of the patron saint, Marco. Its vast dome, upheld by nearly three hundred columns of marble and porphyry, towering like an eastern pagoda, and brilliant with alabaster and emeralds, the spoil of rifled Constantinople, reverberated to the holy anthem within, and the joyous bursts of loyalty without. Amidst the clangour of bells and the shouts of the people, the new doge embarked in a magnificent gondola, covered with a canopy of velvet and gold, and decorated with the banners of the knights of the Golden Stole and St. Mark the Glorious. Onward it moved, amid beating of drums, braying of trumpets, the booming of artillery, and the acclamations of the people, towards the palazzo di San Marco, followed by two hundred gondolas, bearing the standards of noble families, and surrounded by the gleaming bayonets and halberds of the Dalmatians, the Sclavonians, and other battalions of the Venetian capelletti.

The two great pillars, surmounted by gigantic lions, which formerly stood on the Piræus of Athens, and now erected in the arsenal of Venice, were enveloped in garlands of flowers and floating streamers; two hundred cannon thundered forth a salute from the banks of the Grand Canal, while the ships and galleys replied by broadsides in honour of Alvisio. The nobles were escorting the new doge to that lordly dome from which but an hour before the superb catafalco bearing the remains of his aged predecessor had departed. Scattering gold among the people, the Doge Alvisio, ascended the Giant's Staircase, on the summit of which he was invested with the ducal robe and bonnet, studded with precious stones. After which, the most noble Angelo Maria Malipierro, senior of

the forty-one electors, made an oration to Alviso and his words.

And this scene of joy and splendour—to which the bright meridian sun of a glorious summer day lent additional charms, spire and tower gleaming in its golden light, and the long vistas of the sinuous canals (where not shadowed by the gigantic palaces) shining like mirrors of polished gold—Giulio della Torre, who never again could partake of these festivities, stood an outcast felon, fettered and in rags, by the column of infamy that marked the site of his detested palace. Never did he feel the bitter agony of merited humiliation so much as at that moment, when the doge's splendid train, glittering with all the pomp of wealth and nobility, swept through the marble arch of the Rialto.

There is no crime, however foul, for which gold will not procure a pardon, both from church and state, in Italy; but Count Giulio was a beggar, without even one quattrino. Those who now possessed his villas and castles—having either purchased them in the days of his mad extravagance, or holding them from Mocenigo on his forfeiture—were loud in his condemnation; although his hands were yet unstained by blood, and he had been the dupe of a beautiful but vicious woman and the unwitting tool of a desperate debauchee. In the solitude of the horrible piombi, he had ample time to reflect on the insanity of his career, and to repent: he wept for Diomida, and beat his head against his dungeon-walls, in the extremity of his agony. He endured all the pangs of remorse and self-reproach; and looking back to that proud eminence on which he had so lately stood, admired, honoured, and beloved,—a position to which the talents of his high-born ancestors had raised him, and his then virtues entitled him,—Diomida, the gentle, the suffering, and beautiful, arose vividly before him, gashed by the dagger of Strazoldi. Then his reason tottered, and he longed for death to relieve him of his misery.

The new doge, Alviso Mocenigo, remembering an old grudge he bore Count Giulio, showed now, in the plenitude of his power, the true Venetian spirit of revenge: he cast him into one of those dreadful cells under the roof of the palace of St. Mark—the worst of the piombi or leaden dungeons—where the wretched prisoners, stripped to the skin, are chained to the pavement, and exposed to the burning rays of a hot Italian sun concentrated in a focus, until their brains boil and they become raving maniacs.

During the heat of a scorching summer, the unhappy Della Torre experienced these frightful torments in their utmost

extreme, till he found relief in furious madness. The stern Doge Alviso, insatiate in his thirst for revenge, contrived to fall on the galleys of the Maltese knights, where the slaying rod of the task-master restored him to his senses and the pangs of reflection and remorse.

Recollection slowly returned, and the once noble Giulio della Torre, who had been chained to the oar a crazed mariner, became in time a hardened villain, lost to everything but a craving for vengeance on Mocenigo, which, happily, was never gratified. The bandits, bravoos, and other murderous villains, with whom he was compelled to associate, applauded, pitied, and encouraged him by turns, or affected to do so; but the meanest citizen of Venice would not have glanced at him on the highway. Mocenigo died; and for ten long years Giulio tugged at the oar; but the thirst for revenge never passed away. The galley was wrecked on the rocks of Alfieri, on the Calabrian coast; he escaped, and turned robber. From a robber he became a hermit, secluded in the wild woods, and dwelt in the habitation which you now behold.

Know that *I am he* of whom I have spoken: once Giulio Count della Torre di Fana; but prouder of the humble title of Il Padre Eremito of the Tomb! Here have I dwelt for sixty long, weary, and monotonous, though peaceful years. Time seemed to stand still, and death appeared to have forgotten me. Until three days ago, when first I felt his cold hand upon my heart, I feared that, like the wandering Apostle of the Scripture, I was to live on undying, until that last dreadful day when the heavens and the earth, the dead and the living, shall come together.

* * * *

Such was the story related to me by this singular being, omitting the frequent outbursts and exclamations of horror, grief, remorse, and exhaustion with which its course was often interrupted. The dying man now finally paused, overcome with exertion and the intensity of his emotions.

After many pious ejaculations and muttered prayers, his strength gradually became weaker, his voice more faint, and utterly exhausted by his long confession, he sank into that dull lethargy so often the forerunner of death. Rolled up in my cloak, I sat beside him, watching the ebb of decaying nature, and pondering on the peculiarity of my situation and this strange tale of other days. I seemed still to hear the querulous tones of his feeble voice long after his lips had ceased to move; but at last, overcome with the toil of the previous day and night, I could no longer resist the weariness that oppressed me, and sank into a deep sleep.

When I awoke, the morning sun streamed brightly through the ruined window of the tomb, and its yellow light, piercing through the gloom, fell with celestial radiance on the bushy beard, attenuated form, and rigid features of the old recluse. The clasped hands, the fixed eyes, and relaxed jaw informed me that his spirit had fled, and I reproached myself bitterly for having been so forgetful as to sleep, and permit the poor old man to die unwatched. I stirred him, but he felt no more: I laid my hand on his heart, but its pulses were still. How many millions of his contemporaries had been consigned to the tomb, where perchance even their bones could not now be found, while he had lingered on—an animated mummy, withered in heart and crushed in spirit!

I now departed, obliged to leave to fate the chance of the hermit's remains obtaining the rites of sepulture. The idea troubled me but little at that time: when campaigning, unburied bodies are no more thought of than dead leaves by the wayside. But I learned afterwards that, by order of Petronio, bishop of Cosenza, the old hermit was interred with great ceremony in the ancient tomb, which was converted into an oratory, where the prayers of the passers-by might be offered up for the repose of his soul. The gown and rosary of the hermit may yet be seen there by any one who is curious in these matters.

Upon leaving the tomb, I thought more, perhaps, of my horse than of the hermit: poor Cartouche had been exposed to all the fury of the last night's storm. I hastened to the place where I had picqueted him: he was gone, and there still lay many miles of wild and rugged country between me and Crotona! First securing the door of the tomb, to keep wolves, lynxes, or polecats from the remains of the recluse, and muttering a hearty malison on my predicament and the loss of my valuable horse, I set out in the direction of the rising sun, which was my surest guide to Crotona.

After breakfasting on the wild apples, plums, and peaches, that flourished by the roadside, and taking a hearty pull at my friendly flask to correct their crudeness, I pushed forward on my solitary march with all speed. On reaching a place where the road dipped down between two steep impending banks, from the summits of which the shady oaks formed by their entwined branches a thick, impervious arch of the richest foliage, what was my delight on beholding my gallant grey quietly cropping the green herbage under the dewy shade! His reins trailed on the ground, his coat was rough, and the saddle and housings were awry; but on hearing my coyous halloo and whistle, the noble charger pricked up his

ears, neighed in recognition, and, trotting up, rubbed his head upon my shoulder. In a minute more I was upon his back, and passing hill and hollow at a speed which not even the swiftest horse of the boasted Calabrian blood could have equalled.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIEGE OF CROTONA.

DESCENDING the chain of mountains terminating in the Capo della Nuova, I beheld before me the wide expanse of the Adriatic Sea, stretching away into the Gulf of Tarento, now beautifully illumined by the light of the setting sun. As the fiery orb sank behind the hills I had left, it beamed a bright adieu on the towers of the Achaean city, tinging with saffron and gold the waves that broke upon the Capo della Colonna—the ancient promontory of Lacinium, once celebrated for the magnificent temple of Juno, destroyed by the soldiers of Hannibal.

The school of Pythagoras—the glory of Græcia Major—had disappeared with the power of Crotona, and of the majestic fane of Juno Lucina, but one solitary column—rearing its massive shaft above the prostrate ruins of the rest, and half submerged in the waves of the encroaching sea—remained to attest the grandeur of the edifice in its glory, when Greek, Ausonian, and Sicilian, bowed their heads before its pagan altar. The temple is now nothing but a heap of stones, mantled with green slime and sea-weed, and the desolation is heightened by the discordant screams of flocks of sea-birds.

The banks of the classic Neathus have lost all their boasted beauty and verdure, and are now covered with sedgy marshes, and stunted trees, and shrubs very different from that umbrageous foliage which clothed them in the days of Theocritus.

Having ridden for the greater part of the day, under a burning sun, during the sultry hours of afternoon—a time which the voluptuous Italian passes in the slumbers of the siesta—I was half choked by thirst, and the oppressive heat of the atmosphere, and Cartouche was beginning to falter with fatigue. As I slowly followed the tortuous windings of the road to Crotona, the approaching dusk of evening gradually invested in its sombre veil the brilliant scenery: the Adriatic turned from gold to crimson, and the distant hills from emerald green to misty purple, until their bright summits faded away into the dim horizon, and the blue vault of

heaven assumed the aspect of a spangled dome, spanning land and sea; while the moon ascended slowly to her place, like a mighty globe of liquid silver rising from the dark heaving waters of the ocean.

Evening had given place to night; but such a night! It seemed more beautiful than day! The balsamic odours of orange, olive, and lemon groves, were wafted on the soft, refreshing breeze, till the whole air seemed to thicken with delicious fragrance. The sweet strains of the "Ave Maria" stole up the valley from the lighted chapel of a solitary convent, and the deep-toned chimes from a distant steeple were borne on the cool air, mingled with the tinklings from the lowing herds and the evening hymn chanted by the shaggy-coated herdsman, as he drove his cattle towards the basin of a gushing fountain. Myriads of insects buzzed around us, and Cartouche kept switching his long tail like a whip, and shaking his ears with irritation, as they floated in a black cloud around him.

I found the modern Crotona to be little better than a village, dominated by the citadel or castle. Every vestige or memorial of its ancient grandeur had passed away, save the moss-grown column on the cape, and nothing survived of the once magnificent city, from the gate of which the gigantic Milo led forth a hundred thousand men to battle. The superb temples over which waved the banner of Justinian, the massive walls and brazen gates, which the cohorts of Totila, the Goth, assailed in vain, had long since crumbled into dust, and a wretched hamlet marked the site of the ancient Crotona of Mysellus.

The half-ruined citadel, built by Charles V., was occupied by a French garrison. It was blockaded by a brigade of British, commanded by Colonel Macleod, and the free corps of Santugo, on the land side, while the *Amphion* frigate, with a squadron of Sicilian gun-boats, cut off all supplies, succour, and communication from seaward. The French were reduced to great straits at the time of my arrival, and were daily expected to capitulate. General Regnier—who, since the battle of Maida, had endeavoured to maintain his ground between the citadel and Catanzaro (one of the finest towns in the province),—made suddenly a precipitate retreat towards Tarento, abandoning his soldiers in Crotona to their fate.

At Tarento, he was attacked by the chiefs of the Masse and the brigands, who compelled him to retire, after losing seven hundred men. The marchese di Monteleone narrowly escaped being taken prisoner, while leading on a desperate

charge, at the head of a "handful" of cavalry. To his bravery and exertions, when commanding the rear-guard, Buonaparte attributed solely the effective retreat of his shattered forces, through these wild and savage provinces. The discomfited general retreated along the shore of the Adriatic with the utmost rapidity, passing through Melissa, Gariati Nuova, and Rossana, until he reached the northern frontier of Calabria Citra; then, turning like a hunted stag on his pursuers, he stood once more at bay; and, with the remnant of his force, took up a position at Cassano. There he intrenched himself, and awaited the formation of a junction with Massena, the prince of Rivoli,—“the child of victory,” and of devastation,—who was advancing at the head of an army flushed with success. Gaeta, after a brave defence for three months, had been surrendered to Massena's division by Prince William of Hesse Philipstadt.

On my approaching Crotona, the red gleams that flashed across the darkened sky, and the deep booming sounds that broke with sullen reverberations the silence of a calm evening, announced that an interchange of heavy shot was taking place between the besiegers and the citadel. The loud report of the frigate's 42-pounders could easily be distinguished from the lighter artillery of the gun-boats and the currie guns, which formed the only battering-train Macleod had with him. From an eminence, I had a perfect view of the whole plan of operations. The noble frigate—whose lofty masts, well-squared yards, sparkling top-light, and swelling sides, were reflected in the dark blue water—had been hauled close in shore, for the purpose of battering the citadel; but now, as the darkness was fast descending, her boats were towing her beyond range, and she came to anchor out of gun-shot in the Gulf of Tarento.

From the moment the first parallel was laid down, the siege had been pushed strenuously. On the land side, a line of circumvallation, consisting of a good breastwork and ditch, had been drawn around the fortress, to defend its besiegers from the incessant fire of the citadel. The daring and determination of this gallant little garrison, drew forth the admiration of all, save the revengeful Calabrians, who panted for its surrender with a blood-thirstiness increased by resistance. The garrison was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel de Bourmont; it had numbered only a thousand at the time of Regnier's retreat, and was now greatly reduced by the casualties of war. One night, sallying forth at the head of two hundred grenadiers, and passing through a line of counter-approach, De Bourmont completely scoured that part of the

trenches occupied by the Calabrians under Visconte Santugo. The exasperation of these Calabrians, and their thirst for deadly retribution, are inconceivable. On their crucifixes, on their daggers, and on the bodies of the slain, they solemnly vowed vengeance on the garrison when it capitulated, and only our bayonets restrained their cruelty.

The streets of Crotona appeared empty, and the town almost deserted; the spent cannon-shot and shell splinters, against which my horse continually struck his hoofs, sufficiently informed me of the reason. Many houses had been unroofed by the bomb batteries, or reduced to ruins by the cannonade; very few remained inhabited, and those only which were at a distance from the fire of the batteries. The French works were mounted with forty pieces of the heaviest ordnance.

I found Macleod among the parallels, where he was on the alert day and night, superintending the relief and defence of the trenches. His uniform was completely concealed by a rough great coat, above which he wore a tartan plaid to protect him from the dew, that falls heavily by night in this warm climate, and always in proportion to the intensity of the heat of noonday. An undress bonnet, a dirk, and basket-hilted sword completed his equipment. He read by torch-light the laconic letter of his friend the general, who, however, had enclosed documents of a more official nature for Captain Hoste, R.N., commanding the *Amphion*. The note ran thus:—

“DEAR PETER,—If Crotona does not surrender in twenty-four hours after Dundas arrives, take the damned place by storm.—Yours ever,
“J. S.”

“Extinguish the torch, or there will be a vacancy in the Buffs to-morrow!” said Macleod to the soldier who held the hissing and flaring link. At that moment a thirty-two pound shot came whizzing along, and buried itself in the breast-work, covering us with dust and clay. “A narrow escape!” continued the colonel; “these favours are exchanged liberally here. The podestà will order you a billet somewhere for the night, but come to me in the morning; my quarters are in the Strada Larga. I must send you to De Bourmont, as none of my fellows know any language save that spoken north of the Brig of Perth. By dawn, we will have the citadel summoned in due form by sound of trumpet. Meantime, adieu!”

After considerable trouble, I discovered the residence of the podestà, in the miserable market-place. I procured a billet on a house which proved to be a place of entertainment,

though a very desolate one. There I hastened to take up my quarters, wearied with fatigue and the heat of the past day, and having an appetite like that of a hawk. Resigning Cartouche to the care of the colonel's groom, I forthwith ordered a meal which was to pass for dinner and supper. *Briquet à la royale*, garnished with pickles, macaroni with Parmesan cheese, &c., were the best the house afforded; these, with fruit of all kinds, and a decanter or two of Gioja wine, furnished a good repast enough for a hungry soldier, who had just escaped an iron pill that no mortal stomach could digest. The waiter had just removed the cloth, and I was stretching myself on the sofa to enjoy my first cigar, when Santuzo entered, cloaked, booted, and belted, as if for some important expedition.

"How, my lord, for the trenches to-night?" said I, springing up.

"No, faith! the free corps have had enough of the trench duty. But, per Baccho! my friend, how rejoiced I am to see you," he exclaimed flinging his plumed hat one way, and his mantle another. "Caznica, I am going to a place to-night where few men dare show their noses; and yet there are some of the prettiest faces in the kingdom of Naples within its walls—faces which, monsignore, the sun (as being of the impure, masculine gender) dares not even to kiss with his rays. What say you, signor?"

"That I shall be most happy to accompany you, my lord; but let us finish this decanter first."

"Of the most inveterate soakers are you red-coats! Signor Claude, of all men in Italy, I would prefer you to stand by my side to-night."

"There is danger, then?"

"You readily appreciate the compliment. It may so happen that there will be a scuffle," said he gaily, as stretching out his legs and lounging back on his chair he half closed one eye, and with the other scrutinized the colour of his wine with a critical air.

"Good Gioja, that; what vintage, think you?"

"The last earthquake, perhaps."

"I'll trouble you for the caraffa. In short, signor," said the visconte, becoming suddenly grave, "I am obliged to throw myself entirely upon you, and rely on obtaining your assistance and advice. Being a Maltese religious, Castelfermo declines to accompany me, though I know that he loves convents no better than I do. He was once jilted by a nun, and plundered of his patrimony by an abbe, as he may yet relate to you; for poor Marco is a most inveterate preser, and

were to tell his love-story when not absorbed with his other theme, the glories of Malta, the knight Valetta and old Villiers de l'Isle Adam. My relation Benedetto mounts guard in the trenches to-night, and their greatnesses of St. Agatha and Bagnara are doubtless immersed in the intricacies of chess or the nonsense of faro; thus I have no friend but you; and as we were good friends of old in Sicily, and comrades at Maida, I am encouraged to make you the depository of my secret."

This serio-comic preamble led me to expect some wondrous disclosure. He paused for a moment, and heaved a long preliminary sigh; when, as I filled up our glasses, his glance fell upon Bianca's ring, which glittered on my finger. He changed countenance visibly, and for an instant his dark eyes kindled with fire, while his brows knitted and became as one.

I was beginning to erect my bristles in turn; when, assuming a grave but not unpleasant tone, he thus addressed me—

"Signer Claude, I perceive you have already won far on the good graces of my cousin Bianca. From what passed at Palermo, I might have expected this; and yet, considering the shortness of the time, and the pride of the girl, I am somewhat surprised. But I have no wish to interfere; nor shall I have cause; if, in loving her, you bear always in mind that she is the daughter of a soldier, and the cousin of one of the first Neapolitan nobles."

Not altogether pleased at his tone, I was about to reply—perhaps with an air of pique—when he continued, with a laugh—

"Stay, caro Claude! I know what you would say—that you value not a rush the wrath of any man; and that you love Bianca as never man loved woman. I can imagine all that; but beware how you display the jewel before some eyes! Many a poniard that now rests quietly in its sheath might be edged and pointed anew. Eh—hah! excuse my brevity and want of ceremony just now; but, having a love affair in hand, time presses. One at a time is quite enough to be concerned in."

"Believe me, Luigi, if I can be of any assistance, it will afford me inexpressible pleasure."

"Good! I knew you would be my friend."

"But whom mean you to parade?" said I, stretching my hand over a table where my pistols lay.

"Per Bascho!" said he, with an air of displeasure; "a duel is the first thing you Britons think of when one is in a

scrape. There are none fought in Italy. A bravo's poniard at a ducat the inch—you understand?"

"Then, Santugo, the lady——"

"Is a nun of the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena here, at Crotona."

"A nun?"

"In that little word lies all the danger, the difficulty, and the devilry!"

"To poach on the preserves of his holiness is ticklish work in this part of the world!"

"I know it," he replied, gloomily; "and am acquainted with three gentlemen of Naples who, for meddling with ecclesiastics, have borne all the terrors of the law—imprisonment, ignominy, the weight of the public scurlada, and confiscation of everything; they are now compelled to serve under Fra Diavolo, Francatripa, and others, as common brigands. Per Baccho! I have not forgotten the unhappy cavaliere di Castelluccio, who was lately spirited away by the bishop of Cosenza, and has never been heard of since. However, these are but slight dangers for us, over whom the Holy Office once stretched its iron arm. In these days, what priest would dare to put forth his hand against me, the visconte di Santugo, and grand bailiff of Calabria Ultra? Well, Claude, the lady is a nun, and I must have her to-night, even should we be compelled to fire the convent, and carry her off in the confusion. Ah! Del Castagno tried that with a girl at Nicastro—a dashing attempt; but he was caught by the sbirri of the Bishop Petronio, and consigned for six months to a dungeon at Canne, where black bread and stale water so completely cured him of the tender passion, that he regarded the poor damsel with the most pious horror, and has now become the sober-minded husband of cousin Ortensia. But I jest with a heavy heart! Dundas, I believe you to be honourable as I have found you brave; and in the affair of to-night, would rather have you as my comrade than any of the volatile Neapolitans of my acquaintance—fellows whose friendship will perhaps only last while the flask contains a drop of wine and the purse a ducat."

"The lady?" I observed, impatiently.

"Is Bianca's sister."

"How! the Signora Francesca?"

"Even so: the second daughter of old Annibale di Santugo, who fell while fighting under the Cardinal Ruffo in Apulia. Though poor in ducats, he was rich in blood and name—being my father's younger brother. With his last

breath he bequeathed to my care his three motherless girls—Ortensia, Bianca, and Francesca. Francesca was esteemed the greatest beauty in Italy; yet in an excess of folly—or rather, let me call it, generosity—she immured herself in a convent. To remove the only obstacle to her sister's marriage with my friend Benedict, did this dear girl (of all the loves I have had, my only true one!) give up her slender patrimony, and take the veil in this convent at Crotona. But the bright tresses shred from her brow were scarcely consumed on the altar, ere bitter repentance and heart-consuming grief seized her. I was serving with the Neapolitan army in the Roman territories, and had not then seen her—at least since her childhood. Would to God that I never had! How much agony might have been spared both of us! I met her at the baths of Nicastro, where, in strict charge of my mother, she had gone, by special permission, for the recovery of her health, which the close confinement of the cloister, unavailing regrets, and a lingering love for the world she had left, were destroying. I was fiery, ardent, and only three-and-twenty; she, a drooping but beautiful girl, devoted to Heaven—a veiled and vowed nun. Oh! what madness could have prompted me to love her? But Cupid and the devil are always at one's elbow. We were cousins—a dangerous relationship—and our intimacy, open and unconstrained, plunged us at once into this delicious passion, the impulses of which I found it impossible to resist. I evaded the watchful eyes of my mother, and gained, beyond redemption, the affections of poor Francesca. She returned to her convent wretched and heart-broken. Infamy and death are, perhaps, before her. Oh! *Madonna mia!* She must be rescued, and at all risks!" he exclaimed, leaping up, and wrapping his cloak around him. "You will accompany me, of course? Remember, 'tis the sister of Bianca!"

"And if she consents to elope?"

"We must carry her off to a little villa I have somewhere in the Val di Demona. There she can be quietly domiciled until the uproar is over, and I can obtain a dispensation from Rome, after which she may resume her old place in society, and laugh at the authority of the signora abbadessa—who, I learn from her friend, Benedetto, is a regular Tartar. Now, Claude, let us march."

I buckled on my sabre, drained the decanter, and, forgetting the fatigues of the day, set forth with Santugo. We were both muffled up in our cloaks, and had our forage-caps pulled over our faces, to elude observation.

At the corner of the Strada Larga, I lit a cigar at the consecrated lamp before a Madonna, and we pushed on at a brisk pace, regardless of the maledictions and cries of "Eretico!" which my heedless act called forth from some Crotonians who observed it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ABDUCTION.—A SCRAPE.

We left Crotona by an ancient archway, massive, dark, and covered with lichens; and almost hidden beneath a mass of vines and ivy. Through this gate, perhaps, had rolled the "tide of war" that swept away the host of the luxurious Sybarites. Taking the road to the old promontory of Lacinium, a quarter of an hour's walk brought us beneath the high walls of the convent, which, from the summit of a wave-beaten rock, threw a long dark shadow across the moonlit Adriatic. The wild roses and orange-trees grew in luxuriance on three sides of it, and filled the air with a fragrant perfume.

"How brilliant the moonlight is!" said I, by way of saying something, for my lively friend had become unusually silent and thoughtful.

"Hush! Signor Claude; speak softly, and keep well in the shadow. As for the moon, I would that the angel of darkness stretched his wings between us. I could well spare her lustre just now. If we are observed, our walk will have been to little purpose."

"Ghieu! I believe you; ho! ho!" laughed a strange voice near us.

"Did you speak?" asked Santugo, in a fierce whisper.

"Not I," was my somewhat curt reply.

"Corpo di Baccho! then we are watched!" he exclaimed, drawing his sword, and searching about him with kindling eyes.

"Imagination, Santugo."

"Ghieu! ho! ho!" laughed the voice again, close behind me. I turned suddenly round, but saw nothing, save the massively-jointed wall. I was startled and annoyed, and instantly loosened my sabre in its sheath, keeping my sword arm free from the folds of my cloak.

Santugo's irritation was excessive; he ran his sword into every bush, searched every nook and corner, and scanned the whole walls, even at the imminent risk of being discovered, but to no purpose: whether the voice was real or imaginary

was yet a mystery. We listened intently ; all was still, save the soft rustle of the orange-trees, and the dash of the surf, as the Adriatic rolled its waves on the basaltic cliffs beneath the convent walls. A bell, swung from a beam in the square, open-arched campanile, or steeple, tolled midnight ; and a faint, flickering light was immediately seen transiently lighting the tall windows of the chapel, illuminating the bright hues of the stained glass, and burnishing the stone tracery of each in succession.

"Tis Francesca d'Alferi!" exclaimed the visconte, with rapture. "She does penance alone in the chapel to-night ; each sister does so in turn. I have enlisted the zitella of the convent in the service of love, and have no doubt of success." While speaking, he threw a handful of sand against a lattice, which opened, and a young female face appeared ; a rose was thrown to him, and he clapped his hands twice : those were the private signals agreed upon. At that moment, I was certain I heard a growling crackle close by us ; but, without taking notice of it, I listened attentively for any sounds that might follow.

"Is all safe and quiet, Signora Pia?" asked Santugo.

"All, monsignore ; but for sister Francesca's sake and our own, be cautious," replied the girl, with a trembling voice. She then unrolled a ladder of rope from the window, to the inside of which she assured us it was firmly fastened. In imitation of Santugo, I folded my cloak round the left arm, and, mounting after him, scrambled to the summit of the wall ; then leaping down, we found ourselves standing in the garden, where our feet made terrible havoc among the abbess's flower-beds and glass-covered seeds.

"Che gioja!" said Santugo ; "all is safe ! a twenty-cared scampavix awaits us beneath the shadow of the convent wall ; Giacomo has manned it with thirty of the most unscrupulous in the ranks of the free corps. But two grand points are yet to be gained ; the postern must be unbarred, and the cord of the alarm-bell cut ; after which, we may proceed leisurely, and laugh at the rage of the abbadessa." He walked quickly towards the chapel, and I followed, feeling somewhat piqued at the cautious manner in which he revealed to me his plans.

The zitella (or girl of the convent) led us into the chapel, every part of which was involved in deep gloom, except a little shrine, where, beneath a Gothic canopy of white marble, stood a silver image of Saint Hugh. Two tapers glimmering before it served to reveal the figure of the fair devotee, as she knelt with clasped hands before the gilded rail which enclosed the object of her devotions—the shrine of the patron

saint of her family. The beauty of the little edifice, and the richness of its shrines,—its columns with shafts of porphyry and capitals of marble,—its roof of gilded fresco, and floor of the most elaborate mosaic,—its alabaster tombs and gorgeous altar, were all unheeded. We stole softly up a side aisle, and concealed ourselves behind the dark shadow of a monument, where I had leisure to observe Francesca, and compliment Santugo on his admirable taste.

There was something in the gloomy and mysterious aspect of the place, the situation and sombre garb of the recluse, which fascinated me, not less than the beauty of her person. It was long since I had seen her, and she now seemed more lovely and more interesting than ever,—and more like Bianca. Her face was pale—too pallid perhaps—but of a beautiful oval form, and possessing a regularity of feature which would have been deemed insipid, but for the lustre of her dark Ansonian eyes, and the peculiarly aristocratic curl of her lip. Luigi spoke hurriedly:—

“Signor Claude—you remember her—and the night with the conciarotti. ’Tis Francesca—my matchless Francesca, as good as she is timid and beautiful! O, Anima mia—behold me—I am here!” he added, going softly towards her; “courage, sweet one! there is not a moment to be lost. I have possession of the postern towards the sea, where a barge of twenty oars awaits us. Do not shrink from me, Francesca! The hour of deliverance and of happiness is come.”

“O, never for me—on earth, at least! Madonna, guide me, look upon me in this moment of doubt and agony!” she exclaimed, in tones of despair. Sinking against the altar-rail, she clung to it with one hand, and covered her face with the other, sobbing heavily. The visconte knelt beside her. Her beauty, her distress, her resemblance and near relationship to Bianca, all operated powerfully upon me, and I felt for her deeply.

“O, misery!” she exclaimed, in a low but piercing voice; “Luigi of Santugo, to what are you about to tempt me. Reflect upon the deadly sin of this act!”

“Evoe! ho! ho!” laughed a shrill voice, which awakened the thousand echoes of the hollow chapel. Francesca clung to Luigi, overcome with shame and terror; and looking up, I beheld above my head the great visage of the hunchback, peering from beneath the shadow of a Gothic canopy, under which he was squatted “like a pagod in a niche obscure.” A terrible grin of malice and mischief distorted his hideous lineaments. I rushed upon him, but he slid down a pillar like a cat, and eluded me. The startled visconte silenced at

once all the scruples of his cousin, by snatching her up in his arms, and bearing her into the garden,—a task which evidently required considerable exertion, notwithstanding the seeming lightness of her figure. But a plump girl of twenty or so is not so easily run away with as romancers would have us to suppose. At that moment, the alarm-bell was rung furiously, and through the open arches of the campanile, we saw the figure of the hideous imp, Gaspere Truffi, swinging at the end of the rope, and grinning like a demon, while he danced and yelled at the top of his voice, “Evve! ho—ho. Ghieu! Sacrilege and rescue! Ajuto! help!”

“Would to heaven I had pistols to silence the clamours of that apostate wretch!” exclaimed Santugo, as the noise of approaching feet and the halloing of men were heard in the distance. “The bell is arousing the paesani!” he added, drawing his sword. “Quick, signor! As my friend and brother officer, good service must you do me this night, or, by the crown of the Sicilies! you must think no more of Bianca d’Alfieri.” I liked neither the words nor the tone, but pardoned them, out of consideration for the anxiety of my excitable companion.

“The zitella keeps the postern beside the fountain, sparkling in the moonlight yonder, and through that door we must pass to the sea!” The poor zitella lay senseless beside the gate, weltering in her blood, which flowed copiously from a severe wound in her temple, and the key having been broken in the lock by Gaspere, our retreat was utterly cut off! The alarm and exasperation of Santugo were indescribable. The devil! what a moment it was, a forlorn hope was nothing to it!

The bell continued tolling; the whole convent was alarmed, and a mob was heard clamorously demanding admittance at the porch. The visconte’s followers were as noisily enforcing ingress at the seaward gate, on which they thundered with their oars and musket-buttocks, vowing dire vengeance if their lord was in the least maltreated. Long ere this, the Signora Francesca had fainted.

“Aprite la porta—open the gate! Beat it down! Plague of San Carlo upon it! Bravo, Giacomo!” cried Luigi. “Vià! it yields; strike well and together! A hundred ducats to the hand that beats down the door! Heaven be thanked, a cloud is obscuring the moon, and it will not be known which way we steer!”

“Viva la Signora d’Alfieri. Viva Monsignore Santugo! Corraggio, colonello mio!” cried the Calabresi, as they redoubled their attacks on the strong oaken postern.

"Sacrilege!" cried the shrill voice of the abbess from a window, whence she implored the people to rescue a daughter of the church whom brigands were carrying off perforce.

At this critical moment the great gate was opened, and a mob of peasantry, mule-drivers, and fishermen, armed with clubs, rifles, ox-spears, and poniards, almost filling the garden, rushed with a yell upon us. Giacomo's boatmen at the same time had beaten the postern door to fragments, and the light of the waning moon poured through upon the glancing bayonets and white uniforms of the Calabrian free corps.

"Save the vitella!" cried Santugo. Giacomo bore her on board the scampavia, in the stern sheets of which Santugo deposited his cousin, and brandishing his sword aloft, gave a reckless shout of triumph. It was the last I saw of them. Enveloped in murky clouds, the moon sank behind the mountains of Isola, and the scene became suddenly involved in gloom. The assailants were too close upon me, to permit my following the visconte's example by springing on board; and I was compelled to stand on the defensive. I slashed one across the face with my sabre, he fell shrieking into the water, where the relentless Giacomo despatched him with the boat-hook. I was soon hemmed in on every side; and, sinking beneath a shower of blows, was beaten to the ground. The last sound I heard was a yell of defiance and rage, as the broad oars dipped into the water, and the swift scampavia shot away like an arrow from the shore.

Supposing me slain, Luigi thought only of saving Francesca; and while his twenty rowers pulled bravely, the soldiers gave the baffled pursuers a volley from their firelocks. The Calabrian peasants never went abroad without their cartridge-boxes, poniards, and rifles. The latter were in instant requisition; and a skirmish ensued, in which several were wounded on both sides before the fugitives were beyond range of musket-shot.

Reckless and bold as he was by nature, perhaps Santugo would not have dared to commit such an outrage against his religion, and the prejudices of the Italian people, at any other time. But the power of the church, shaken by the recent destruction of the (misnamed) Holy Office, was feeble; and such was the disorderly state of the country, then filled with armed banditti, who made it the scene of perpetual rapine and warfare, that the authority of the law, at all times weak, was completely neutralized. The rank, power, and wealth of Santugo's family, and his interest with Carolina and the court of Palermo, emboldened this wild young noble to plunge into what was esteemed by the superstitious and bigoted Cal-

brians as a deed replete with sacrilege and horror, and which could not fail to draw down the utmost vengeance of the church and Heaven itself upon the unhappy perpetrator and his impious followers. Indeed, a short time afterwards the papal malison was duly thundered forth against Santugo and myself, and published in the columns of the *Diario di Roma*, consigning us to the warm protection of his most satanic majesty.

For that I cared less than for the broken head and sore bones which were my share of this adventure. I had also the pleasant prospect of my name becoming a standing quiz at every mess in the Mediterranean when the story appeared in the *Gazetta Britannica*—a gossiping, military, patriotic paper published during our occupation of Sicily, and the *only* public journal in the island, where the press is (or was) under the severest restrictions.

The clamours of the people at this act of sacrilege led me to expect the worst treatment at their hands. Stunned by the blow of a club, I was severely beaten while lying on the beach, and narrowly escaped being poniarded by the hunchback; from whose vindictive malice I was saved only by the intervention of a priest. Elevated on the shoulders of some herdsmen, Truffi now harangued the rabble—proposing, first, that they should tie a stone to my neck and cast me into the sea, or bind me to a tree, and make me a target for their rifles at eighty paces. Resistance was vain, as they had securely bound me with my sash. But I demanded instant liberation, and that my sabre should be restored to me; and I threatened severe retribution from our general and the chiefs of the Masse, should they dare to maltreat me.

Though they laughed at my threats, their effect was not altogether lost, and I was not subjected to further violence. Placed upon a sorry ass, and accompanied by a throng of shouting peasantry, I was conducted back to Crotona in ridiculous triumph, and then thrust into an iron cage at the end of the Casamatta, or ancient prison of the town, where I was left to my own reflections for the remainder of the night, or rather morning—for it was then past three o'clock. I was burning with indignation against these base ragamuffins, whose pomelling made every joint of my body ache, but nevertheless soon fell into a sound sleep on the stone floor of the cage; nor did I awake until the morning sun shone down the picturesque vista of the dilapidated Strada Larga. I arose with stiffened limbs, and at first was unable to comprehend where on earth I was. But the cries of "eretico!" "assassino!" "ribaldone!" &c., and a thousand other injurious epithets with which I had been greeted by the rabble, were yet ringing in my ears, and, toge-

ther with the disordered state of my dress, brought the whole affair to my recollection. With revengeful bitterness, I remembered the many indignities I had received from Gaspare Truffi: once he had snapped a pistol in my face, twice he attempted to poniard me, and he would probably have had me despatched, but for the firm intervention of an old Basilian father. A dim recollection floated before me of having seen his gnome-like visage peering between the iron bars of the cage long after the crowd had departed—his eyes glaring with hatred and malice, that made them glisten like a snake's, beneath the dark shadow of his heavy brows—while he informed me, in the guttural Italian of Naples, that I would "yet feel his knife between my ribs, as he was sworn to revenge his gambling defeat at Nicastro," and the sabre-cut bestowed on his hump at the villa of Alfieri.

"Sdeath!" thought I, while starting up from my hard couch, "I must have this creature flogged or hung! It is too ridiculous to be persecuted by a contemptible hunchback, who follows me like an evil genius everywhere. Ola, Signor Benedetto, cavaliere del Castagno!" I cried aloud, as that redoubtable gentleman swung himself over a window of the podestà's house, and alighted in the street about a hundred yards from me. But without looking to where the voice came from—as he had evidently no wish to be recognized—he drew his hat over his eyes, threw his ample cloak over his disordered attire, and hurried down the Strada Larga. I remembered the podestà's daughter—a pretty girl, from whom I had received my billet last evening.

"Poor Ortensia!" thought I; "and thus your loving benedict spends his tour of duty in the trenches!"

Save himself, no one seemed yet stirring in Crotona; its ruined streets were completely deserted. At times a casual patrol of our troops passed; but these were far beyond hail; and, in truth, I looked forward with dread to being discovered in the cage—knowing too well it would furnish a subject for laughter to every corps in Sicily. The idea of the general's aide-de-camp being barred up in an iron cage, like a common rogue, or a rat in a trap, was too replete with ridicule to be patiently endured; but, after a few attempts to break prison and escape, I was obliged to abandon the attempt, and await my deliverance patiently.

To increase my annoyance, a few withered and sunburned gossips gathered round the parapet of a circular well (a fountain, by the bye, is ever the grand rendezvous of Italian gossips), and after filling their classic-shaped jars with water, they rested them on the margin of the spring, and stared at

me to their full contentment, relating to the passers-by their own version of the story, with such additions and variations as the exuberance of their fancy or hatred of a heretic suggested. To the peasant, come to market in his wolf-skin jacket and leather gaiters; the hind, driving his team of oxen to the field; the shepherd, on his way to the mountains; to the water-carrier; the impudent, rosy-faced, itinerant improvisatore, with his lute; and the white-bearded Franciscan, with his greasy, angular hat, snuff-begrimed cassock, and begging-box;—to each and to all who stopped at the well, did these shrivelled crones relate, with great emphasis and gesticulation, the story of the sacrilege committed at the convent of St. Catherine by the English heretic.

Vehement and ugly, as all old women in southern Italy are (the lower classes, at least), they soon collected a dense crowd round the cage, and I was stared upon by a circle of hostile eyes, in a manner very unpleasant to endure. I might have laughed at a predicament so ridiculous, but the petulance of the Crotonian rabble soon became annoying; their religious scruples were aroused by the malicious observations of these old gossips, and I began to expect a martyrdom like that of St. Stephen.

But relief was at hand. Cavaliere Benedetto, though he hurried off so abruptly, had recognized me, and despatched a party from the trenches to my rescue. I hailed with joy their glittering bayonets, which I soon saw flashing above the head of the mob. Bitter was the wrath of the Italian soldiers, when they beheld me so unworthily treated; their musket-butts were in immediate requisition, and in three minutes one side of the cage was dashed to pieces, and I was free.

Under their escort I gladly hurried to my billet, where I put my disordered uniform in proper trim for appearing before Macleod after breakfast.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SUMMONS OF SURRENDER.

MEANWHILE, Santugo and his fair companion were ploughing the waters of the Adriatic, and scudding along the coast of Calabria as fast as twenty oars and an ample lateen sail, filled by a strong Borea, or breeze from the north, could carry them. With the visconte, and still more with his cousin, the affair was not yet ended; innumerable griefs and troubles were in store for them. But I heard no more of the abduction for a time, save in the jokes of my comrades, and once in

friendly note from the general, warning me to avoid all such affairs in future, as they were calculated to prejudice the Calabrians against us, and injure the cause of Ferdinand, for whom we were fighting.

I had just completed my brief toilette, and was hastily paying my respects to hot chocolate, devilled fowl, cream cheese, marmalade, and maccaroons, when Santugo's grave friend, the Maltese knight, *il cavaliere Marco di Castelarmo*, entered.

"Basta!" he exclaimed, casting aside his sword and sable cloak, "what have you and the visconte been about last night? Broken into a convent of consecrated nuns, as if it had been a mere bordello of Naples, and carried off, by force of arms, the queen of that sainted community! It is a sad affair, signor."

"Sad, indeed, as my ribs find, to their cost, this morning; moreover, I have lost in the scuffle a splendid sable of Damascus,—the last gift of a friend who fell beneath the guns of Valetta."

"Ah! you served there? So did I. So Santugo has robbed the convent of its brightest jewel, Francesca d'Alfieri, who shone among the beauties of Palermo like a comet among the lesser stars."

"The young lady has attractions which——"

"Attractions!" exclaimed the enthusiastic Italian; "I tell you, signor, she is magnificent! Ah! had you seen her last year, when she appeared as Madonna, on the festival of the blessed Virgin! The whole country did homage to her wondrous beauty. Francesca seemed a vision of something more than mortal, as she sailed along on the lofty gilded car, among clouds of gauze and silver, with a crown of diamonds blazing on her ebon tresses, wings on her shining shoulders, and incense, divine music, light and glory, floating round her. Basta! she was an angel of love! The people, as they knelt, forgot their prayers to Madonna, and offered up only praises of her beauty. I honour the visconte for carrying her boldly off. The girl would have been destroyed in an Italian convent; where (I blush to say it) purity of heart is a wonder, and innocence a crime. But I tremble to think of the retribution which the bishop of Cosenza may deem due for the abduction: he is a stern, relentless fellow."

"But what will the lieutenant-colonel commanding think of Santugo abandoning his battalion—deserting, in fact, with thirty rank and file of the free corps, with their arms and accoutrements?"

"His youth, rank, and the ideas of our country, must plead for him."

"And then the sacrilege, signor: what will the people say of it?"

"Just what they please. Santugo is too spirited a cavalier to value a rush the silly scruples of a bigoted peasantry, or the idle thunders of a knavish priesthood. He will only remember, that, in abducting his cousin,—replete with danger though the act may be,—he has done a good deed in the cause of love and humanity. *Corpo di Baccho!* read 'The Prosecution of the Dominican Nuns of Pistoia, in 1781, by the Canon Baldi,' and you will see there disclosed a mass of the most corrupt female profligacy,—a revelation amusing as it is horrible. Signor, you would shrink with dismay, if made acquainted with one-half of what passes within the walls of our southern convents, where belladonna, the dungeon, and the poniard, are too often at work. In the indictment of the Canon Baldi, there is displayed a regular system of depravity, into which the young nuns are slowly initiated (after the first year of their novitiate is past), as into a lodge of Freemasonry,—craving pardon of the gentle craft for a comparison so vile. *Basta!* manfully as I have fought for Italy and her ancient liberties, I would yet more willingly lend a hand toward the utter demolition of every convent within the land. Still, thanks to Madonna, I am a true Catholic, and commander of the Maltese cross, and as such I swear to you, signor, on the blessed badge of the isle, that no man has a better reason for being at feud with the female order of ecclesiastics than I have. I was ruined in my prospects, seared in heart, and robbed of my patrimony, by the knavery of an abbess and the art of a deceitful nun. But enough of this." He paused, with a kindling eye, and his cheek coloured, as if he remembered that more had been said than was quite necessary; but mastering some old recollection or inward emotion, by a strong effort, he continued, in a tone of affected carelessness, "Signor Claude, there is a relief in telling one's sorrow; and some night, when the Gioja or Lipari loosens my tongue, you may learn how it first came to pass that I shaped the Maltese cross on my shoulder. But just now we must hurry to the trenches, upon which De Bourmont has commenced his morning salute of round-shot and grape."

We found the whole citadel of Crotona, and the outwork possessed by the French between it and the sea, enveloped in white smoke, amid which the dark corbelled battlements, the flames that flashed through, and the bayonets that glit-

tered over them, were seen for a moment, and then obscured as the smoke-wreaths rolled on the morning wind. The French worked at their batteries manfully, pouring showers of cannon-shot, bombs, and bombelles on our troops, who were pretty secure behind their breastworks, and repaid them with considerable interest, from an eminence on which a fascine battery was erected.

Le Moine fired salvoes by sound of bugle, and the *Amphion* discharged her broadsides, and with such effect, that a great part of the castle wall came away in a mass from the rocks, and the unfortunate who lined it were hurled into the ditches in an instant; the well-jointed masonry rolled down like a stony avalanche, and cannon, with their carriages, fragments of bodies and weapons, strewed the streets below. Three hearty cheers arose from our trenches, and were echoed by the tars of the *Amphion*, which was hauled yet closer in shore, and poured her shot in rapid succession on the lower works of the citadel. The Sicilian gun-boats, with their thirty-two pounders and howitzers, dealt death and destruction among the sand-bag batteries and stockades; these the French soon abandoned, retiring with precipitation into the castle of Carlo V. After maintaining a brisk cannonade for nearly two hours, the fire of the enemy began to slacken, and by the material with which their guns were served,—such as pieces of metal, crow-bars, broken bottles, stones, bolts, and bags of nails,—we perceived with satisfaction that their ammunition was fast failing. Yet they manned the breach, as if expecting an assault immediately; and, even while exposed to a galling fire, worked bravely, repairing the damaged wall with fascines, bags of sand and wool, stakes, and “chandeliers.” They were doubtless resolved to meet any escalade with the courage of Frenchmen, and with the indomitable valour that distinguished all the soldiers of the empire.

At last the fire on both sides ceased, the clouds of smoke curled away from the old towers of Charles V., the bright sun shone joyously on bastion and curtain, and we plainly beheld the sad havoc made by the salvoes of our batteries and the broadsides of the frigate.

“Now, Dundas!” cried Macleod, scrambling out of the trenches, “as the gallant Monsieur de Bourmont has given over his morning’s shooting, and as you know something of his lingo, just tie a handkerchief to the point of your sword, and go up and inquire whether or not he means to surrender the place without any more bother? If not, let him expect broken heads to be plenty before tattoo to-night. By heaven! the Ross-shire Buffs will dye their

tartans red in the best blood of his garrison, brave fellows though they be!"

"And the terms, colonel?"

"Such as Frenchmen—such as brave soldiers may accept without dishonour; but nothing more. Give this my summons of unconditional surrender; and, as they know not of the fall of Gaeta and Massena's advance, they will no doubt yield at discretion."

With a white handkerchief fluttering from the point of my sabre, and having a Corsican bugler in attendance, I departed on my mission from the trenches, where more than two hundred of our soldiers lay weltering in their blood. Most of their wounds being inflicted by cannon-shot, or the explosion of bombs, were ghastly beyond description. The earthen trenches in some places were literally flooded with gore. None but those who have seen a man bleed to death from his wounds being left undressed, can imagine how much blood the human frame contains. The ensanguined mud, where corpses, wounded men, fascines, shot, and shell, lay all mingled together, made our approaches frightful, and I gladly sprang out and left them behind me.

As usual, the morning was beautiful; earth and sky were bright with summer splendour. The sea of Adria shone in a blaze of yellow light, and the chain of mountains stretching away to Isola, the little white village dotting the sandy beach, and the solitary column of Juno Lucinia, afar off, made up a charming landscape, the beauties of which my mind was then too much occupied to appreciate. To bear a flag of truce is an exciting duty, and I felt my pulses quicken on finding myself close under the enemy's cannon, yet warm with the heat of their last discharge. As I approached the old fortress, its walls shone gaily in the bright sunlight; but the blood oozing from the carved stone gargoyles, or spouts, of the battlements, told a terrible tale of the havoc made by our shot and shell.

An ample tricolour waved lazily in the warm breeze, and serried lines of bright bayonets glittered over the ramparts, while grim faces peered at me through the dark embrasures and narrow loopholes of the time-worn walls. The troops were formed in *rank-entire*, with arms shouldered. Poor old Bourmont was evidently making the greatest possible display of his force.

When within twenty yards of the gate, the Corsican sounded "a parley;" which was answered by beat of drum within the fortress. The rattling drawbridge descended, and a wicket opened in the gate, which was composed of enormous

palisades, cramped and bolted together. (I observed everything narrowly while they allowed me the use of my eyes.) Immediately on stepping through the wicket, we were encircled by twelve voltigeurs, with fixed bayonets; and a young French officer, saluting me with his sabre, informed me that my eyes must be immediately blindfolded, and my orderly committed to close ward in the guard-house.

"Monsieur," I said, indignantly, "I am, as you see, a staff officer in the service of his Britannic majesty, the bearer of a despatch to Lieutenant-Colonel de Bourmont and not a spy!"

"My orders are strict," he replied, with equal hauteur; "since you have entered the gates, your eyes must be blindfolded, or you and the bugler will be made prisoners forthwith! I pledge you my word as a gentleman and soldier, that no dishonour will be offered." We shook hands; the Corsican boy was consigned to the care of the barrier guard, while my eyes were blindfolded, and giving me his arm, the officer led me away in this ludicrous manner, I knew not whither.

On the bandage being removed, I found myself in a large vaulted room of the old castle. It was roofed with stone, and I heard the tramp of feet and rumble of gun-slides on the bartizan above. The groined arches sprang from twelve dilapidated corbels, representing the apostles. A bare wooden table, a few chairs and trunks, cloaks and sabres hanging on the wall, spurred boots, empty bottles, and cigar-boxes lying in a corner, constituted the furniture of the room. The light streamed into it between the stone mullions and corroded iron bars of three deeply-embayed windows, through which a view was obtained of the Gulf of Tarento, stretching away to the north, and the dark, wooded ridges of La Sylva to the westward, rising five thousand feet above the sea's level.

Coffee, wine, cigars, French army-lists, Parisian *Moniteurs*, and the last grand bulletin, lay on the table, at which De Bourmont, a fat but pleasant-looking old man, dressed in a blue frogged surtout and scarlet trowsers, with a crimson forage-cap, was seated with another officer, at breakfast.

"Monsieur le Commandant," said the officer who introduced me, "a flag of truce from the trenches—an officer of the enemy."

"Ah! they have come to terms at last!" said the little commandant, nodding with a very satisfied air to the officer who sat opposite him; and then rising, he handed me a chair. "Proud to see you, monsieur," he added, uncovering his bald

head; "be seated—the wine is close to you. There is Muscatelle, or, if you like it better, far-famed Lachryma Christi and Greco, from grapes raised on the slopes of Vesuvius. We can get these things, you see, notwithstanding that the Scots colonel does push the trenches so vigorously. Mille bombes! ah, what a man he is! Yes, and we can get that which warms our hearts better than even Falernian wine or Greco—eh, Pepe?" he added, rubbing his nose, and giving a sly glance at his morose companion, who intently broke the shell of his third egg, without deigning to notice me.

"Would you prefer chocolate to wine, monsieur?" continued the colonel. "We will talk over matters during breakfast. I am glad you have come to terms—very!"

I accepted his invitation, but could not resist smiling at the complacent manner in which the Frenchman spoke of besiegers coming to terms with the garrison of a place which their cannon had almost reduced to ruins.

"How did your free Calabrians like the way we scoured the trenches the other night?" asked Captain Pepe, while handing me coffee.

"You taught them a good lesson. The marmalade? Thank you. An hour in the trenches has given me quite an appetite."

"And how did your old tub of a frigate, and her fry of gun-boats, like the chain-shot, the cross-bars, and stang-balls we favoured them with this morning?"

"Monsieur, I did not come here to answer insolent questions, but to deliver this despatch to Colonel Bourmont, who, I have the pleasure to perceive, is a French officer of the old school—a gentleman, and not a Parisian bully."

A quiet smile spread over Bourmont's face, as he bowed and took Macleod's letter; while Pepe, like a cowed bravo, bit his white lips, and glared at me with ill-concealed malice and animosity; but I continued to help myself with perfect composure.

Exasperated by this cutting contempt—"By heaven and hell!" he exclaimed, "were it not that I must hold sacred the white flag you carry—mille baionettes!—I would cut you in two!" and starting from the table, Pepe retired into a recess of the window, where he affected to observe the saucy *Amphion*, which was riding with her broadside to the shore, the union-jack waving from her mizen peak—a striking feature in the view, but ill-calculated to soothe the wrath of the irritated Gaul. I could read the history of this repulsive man in the coarse features and strong lines of his sunburnt visage.

The French army at that time possessed many such spirits

Raised from the dregs of the people during the anarchy which followed the revolution, many of the actors in those frightful tragedies and massacres that disgrace the nation became—rather by the force of circumstances, than their own deserts—commanders in the armies of Buonaparte. Savage and black-hearted, furious and sour republicans, thus found themselves marching beneath the banners of an emperor, and some of them obtaining honours in that profession which numbers all the kings and princes of Europe among its members. But the true Parisian rabble, without one spark of the generous spirit of the soldier, were destitute of the chivalry which distinguished the old French armies in the time of the Bourbons. A knowledge of the men they fought against, caused our troops to regard the soldiers of the revolution with equal detestation and contempt; this latter feeling, however, soon became changed when they encountered them as the army of Napoleon, who restored France to that honourable place among the kingdoms of Europe, from which she fell in 1792. The sanguinary rabble who hailed with yells of triumph the axe as it descended on the neck of the queenly Marie Antoinette—who clove in two the head of the beautiful Princess Lamballe, and dragged her naked body for days about the kennels of Paris, were forgotten when contemplating the glories of Napoleon, the long succession of his victories, the devotion of his soldiers, and the chivalric enthusiasm of the old guard. But to proceed.

De Bourmont looked over Macleod's letter in various ways, but could make nothing of it; upon which he asked me to translate it. So far as I can remember, it ran thus:—

"Trenches before Crotona, July, 1806.

"SIR,—Further resistance on your part being now in vain, I give you until sunset to send away all the women and children; after which, if the citadel be not surrendered, your garrison shall be buried in its ruins.

"I have the honour to be, &c. &c.,

"PETER MACLEOD, Lieut.-Col.

"Commanding Ross-shire Buffs."

"Lieut.-Col. DE BOURMONT,

"Knt. Grand Cross of the Iron Crown,

"and Commandant of Crotona."

"*Sur ma vie!*" said the little colonel, reddening with indignation, and turning up his eyes on hearing this blunt message. "*Poof!* what say you to this, Pepe, my boy?"

"*Guerre à mort!*" growled the polite Captain Pepe. "*Bedieu!* I would slit the bearer's nose, and send him back

to the writer, as a fitting answer. Or what think you to summon a file of the guard, and cry *à la lanterne*, as of old? Mille bombes! I have served many an English prisoner so in Holland; but that was in the days of Robespierre."

"Halt! silence, monsieur!" said Bourmont, angrily; "remember that you are among the soldiers of Napoleon the First, not the rabble of the faubourgs of Paris." The captain bit his nether lip and again retired to the window, while the colonel continued:—

"I shall not surrender; having good reasons for fighting to the last: and you, monsieur—monsieur——"

"Dundas"—I suggested.

"Ah! Dundas; yes; pardon me. You are too much of a soldier not to be aware of them."

"Colonel, I know not to what you refer. General Regnier has taken up a position at Cassano, from which he will inevitably be driven with immense slaughter by the chiefs of the Masse and the leaders of the brigands, who are all drawing to a head in that direction; so from him you can expect no succour. Monteleone by this time must have yielded to Colonel Oswald; and, Scylla excepted, every fortress has opened its gates to us. Of a force of 9,000 men who encountered us at Maida, 3,000 only march under the standard of Regnier. In the upper province, your troops have melted away before the Italians alone. Our shipping cut off all retreat by sea, our troops by land. You must capitulate; resistance will be madness, and a useless sacrifice of your brave soldiers; therefore, permit me to entreat you to think well over the answer which I am to bear to an antagonist so fiery and determined as Macleod."

"Monsieur aide-de-camp, I thank you for the advice; but I hope French soldiers will not be cowed by Scot or Englishman," said the colonel. "Remember, that in the service of the emperor, to be unfortunate *once* is to be for ever lost. Do you pretend ignorance of the fact that Gaeta was surrendered lately by the prince of Hesse Philipstadt to Massena, who is now pushing on to our relief, and is by this time within a short day's march of Regnier's position at Cassano?"

"I know that the strong fortress of Gaeta has surrendered, after a gallant resistance," I replied, equally surprised and chagrined that *he too* was aware of the circumstance; "but whoever informed you that Marshal Massena was in the frontiers of Calabria Citra, told that which is false! His division is still at Gaeta, nearly two hundred miles from Cassano."

"Then I have been deceived!" exclaimed Bourmont,

bitterly. This intelligence seemed to fall upon him like a thunderbolt. After a little reflection, he said, "Monsieur, if you pledge me your word of honour that the marshal is so far off, I will yield Crotona within an hour, reserving permission for the garrison to march out (through the breach, if we choose) with all the honours of war—with bag and baggage, colours flying, and drums beating—the officers, of course, retaining their swords, and the whole force to be permitted to march to the camp of Cassano without further hostility."

"Impossible, monsieur! who can answer for the barbarous banditti and lawless soldiery of the Massei? Remember the escape of Monteleone, and the massacre of his regiment at La Syls!"

"True, true!" he muttered, bitterly. "Mon Dieu! we are but a handful!"

"As a gentleman, as an officer, I pledge you my word, colonel, that Massena's division has not yet left even the Terra di Lavoura."

"Enough, monsieur; Crotona is lost; and with it the faithful services of many an arduous year! Arcole, Lodi, Marengo—O my God!" he covered his face with his hand.

"Ghieu! ho! ho!" croaked the voice of the everlasting hunchback, as he emerged from a recess in the thick wall, where he had been coiled up, unseen by me. "I tell you, Signor Colonello, that the prince of Rivoli's advanced guard was at Latronico, in Basilicata, three days since!"

"Now, by heavens! crookback again, and *here* even!" I exclaimed, bestowing a black look on Truffi, whose false assertions were calculated to stagger De Bourmont. "This wretch, then, is the channel of your intelligence, monsieur? If my pride would permit me condescending so far as to defend myself against the idle contradictions of such a despicable opponent, I have in my sabretache a letter which proves where the marshal was three days ago. It was found among the papers of an officer killed by a cannon-shot, when our fleet fired on Regnier's line of march by the Adriatic."

"A letter; bravissimo!" croaked Gaspare, while he snapped his fingers like castanets, and grinned so hideously that I burst into a fit of laughter. "Ghieu! Era scritto in tempo del scirocco!" (Fie! it was written in time of the sirocco).

"No, Signor Canonico, you mistake," observed Captain Pepe, who could not resist giving us the vulgar Italian joke. "The letter, I have no doubt, was indited at the trenches yonder, and may be right after all. You know that a pig and

an Englishman are the only animals insensible to the effects of the sirocco."

"Excellent," roared the hunchback, his hump heaving with laughter.

"Captain Pepe will oblige me by retiring to his quarters, and Frà Gaspare by quitting the room," said De Bourmont, indignantly. "In my presence, no British officer shall be wantonly insulted. Montaigne, send her the Captain de Viontessancourt; I will confer with him on this matter."

Pepe and Truffi disappeared together, and Montaigne, the officer who had introduced me, and who had hitherto remained silent, in a few minutes ushered in a tall elderly man,—one of those kindly-looking old fellows that gain one's good-will at first sight. He wore a light green uniform, and the medals on his breast, together with the keen, determined expression of his eye, announced him a thorough soldier; while his politeness and urbanity declared him to be every way the reverse of Mr. Pepe; in fact, he was one of those high-minded chevaliers of old France who had weathered the sanguinary storms of the revolution. His hair was white as snow; and he seemed to be about sixty years of age. Bourmont introduced him to me, saying—

"Captain de Viontessancourt, 23rd voltigeurs of the emperor—Lieutenant Dundas, of the British service. My friend Viontessancourt has grown grey under his harness; and with him I will consult on this matter; it is useless to ask counsel of any of my other officers, whose continual cry is 'guerre à mort!'"

Giving me a file of *Moniteurs* to peruse, and pushing a brace of decanters towards me, he drew the tall chevalier into one of the deep-recessed windows, where they remained in earnest confab for nearly half an hour. Bourmont then seated himself at the table at which I was sitting, and wrote to Macleod, offering to surrender the citadel, if the garrison were permitted to evacuate it with the honours of war, and march without molestation to the French camp at Cassano.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARCHING OUT WITH THE HONOURS OF WAR.

To this proposal Macleod was half inclined to accede; but the captain of the frigate, a sturdy and impatient sailor, whom he consulted on the occasion, advised his accepting of nothing but an unconditional surrender. The colonel, who perfectly

understood the punctilious ideas of military honour which animated De Bourmont, was inclined to spare that gallant Frenchman the disgrace of a complete capitulation ; but yet, being resolved to get possession of Crotona, he had recourse to a curious military quibble, which has been resorted to on more than one occasion ; particularly when General Ferrand, in 1793, surrendered the town of Valenciennes to our troops, under H.R.H. the duke of York.

I returned to the citadel with Macleod's answer, and the high-spirited Bourmont, yielding to the pressure of circumstances, was obliged to consent to the dictated terms : these were—that his troops should march forth from the gates of Crotona, with all the insignia of military parade to the banks of the Esaro, where, at a given place, they were to halt, pile arms, yield themselves prisoners of war ; surrendering arms, colours, drums, cannon, and everything, except their baggage. After some troublesome diplomacy, and journeying to and fro between the trenches and the citadel, I got the whole affair arranged, and the articles of capitulation signed and sealed by both commanders, within an hour of sunset, by which time Bourmont's garrison was paraded, for the last time, in heavy marching order, and ready to evacuate the place.

The sun was setting behind the mountains when the frigate fired a gun ; and before the white smoke had curled away through her lofty rigging, the tricolour had descended from the ramparts of Crotona. The gates were thrown open, and the drawbridge descended with a clatter across the ditch.

"It is the signal-gun : they come now !" cried Macleod, as he leaped on his horse. "Mr. Dundas, the brigade will come to 'attention' and 'shoulder.' Drumlugas," he added, addressing a strong, broad-chested, and red-whiskered captain of his regiment, "march your company to the gates, and the moment the last Frenchman has left them, hoist the standard. But, in the first place, march in and receive over the posts."

The tall captain touched his bonnet, and giving the order—"Grenadiers, threes right, quick march ;" his company, with the band in front, marched up to the guard-house, where the French guard was under arms ; and where, after all the usual formula, the whole of the sentries and posts were relieved by the Highlanders.

After delivering Macleod's order to the different battalions of his brigade, I selected from the ranks of the Calabrese corps, Luca Labbruta (or blubber-lipped Luke), a ferocious follower of Santugo, to watch for Gaspare Truffi (who, not being a French subject, was not included in the capitulation), and to seize the hunchback the moment the garrison marched out. He

touched his knife with a grim smile of intelligence, and left me.

The British forces, consisting of the 78th Highlanders, les Chasseurs Britanniques, a small party of artillery, and the marines of the *Amphion*, formed two lines from the gate, facing inwards, and through this lane the garrison of Crotona were to march. In the rear were drawn up the ranks of the free corps, scowling darkly, and handling their murderous poniards with a sternness of intent and ferocity of manner which declared how little they relished the modern laws of war, or understood that chivalric courtesy which brave men may yield to each other with honour, and which the soldiers of Britain and France can so well appreciate. Behind these dark-visaged battalions crowded the people of Crotona; while every window, nook, and corner, were filled with faces, eager to get a glimpse of their dreaded enemies, on whom they showered maledictions and abuse without cessation. The picturesque costumes of the crowd lent additional interest to the scene; the madonna-like profiles of the women, shaded by their linen head-dresses falling gracefully on the shoulders, or crowned by luxuriant dark hair, secured by a gilt arrow, agreeably contrasted with the aspect of the well-mustachioed contadino, grim and swart, half bandit and half peasant, clad in his shaggy doublet and high hat, flaunting with ribands and the red cockade of Ferdinand IV.; a dagger and horn in his belt, and the long rifle sloped on his shoulder, as we see him depicted in the spirited etchings of Pinelli. The buffalo herdsman with his long pole or glittering ox-goad, the bearded canon with dark robes and shaven scalp, and a thousand other striking figures made up a scene such as a painter or romancer would love. A battalion of the Chasseurs Britanniques—a corps composed of men of every nation—were drawn up opposite the Ross-shire Buffs, the garb of the latter nearly resembling that of the imperial legions whose swords had laid all Europe and part of Asia at the feet of Rome.

Filling up the background of this novel and picturesque scene, on one side rose the dark citadel, with its heavy ramparts and macciolated battlements, in the style of the middle ages; on the other, lay the little Italian town, with its balconies, verandahs, and terraces—its flat roofs of wood or tile, and its little square towers, open on four sides, and covered with broad projecting roofs—one half in light, the other in deep shadow, as the setting sun poured its ruddy lustre from the summits of the distant hills. Beneath the castled rocks shone the glassy gulf, where cape and headland, breasting the rolling waves, stretched

away to the horizon in dim perspective, till the soft blue of the ocean blended with that of the evening sky, and some white shadowy sail alone indicated the line where air and ocean met.

Immediately after the gun was fired from the *Amphion*, the French drums were heard beating, and the garrison came forth, about six hundred strong; having two field-pieces in front, with two tumbrils of ammunition, and two of baggage. They marched in subdivisions, with bayonets fixed, the right in front, the field officers mounted, with colours flying and brass drums beating; the gunners carried their linstocks lighted at both ends, and a ball was placed in the mouth of each piece of ordnance. Their *tout ensemble* was peculiarly service-like and soldierly; their dark greatcoats enlivened by red worsted epaulettes and scarlet trousers, and the bear-skin caps surmounting bronzed visages with rough, wiry mustachios. Many of them were veterans of the empire, with hair grey as their gaiter knapsacks. The hoarse rattle of their brass drums, the sharply sonorous trumpets and clashing cymbals—a not unharmonious clangour of metallic music—loudly resounding as they marched through the archway of the citadel, lent additional spirit to the scene, as they advanced with all the order and steadiness of a review on the Champ de Mars. Their bayonets, brass-feruled musket-barrels, and the gilt eagles on their caps, gleamed in the rays of the setting sun, and the heavy silken tricolour flapped in the breeze, as it was up-borne above the marching column by Bourmont's only son, a mere boy, fitter for his mother's side than the harrowing scenes of war.

"Portez vos armes!" cried Bourmont, lowering his salaré on passing the first stand of colours.

"Brigade—present arms!" answered Macleod, with a voice loud and clear as a trumpet; and our double line "presented," the officers in front saluting with their swords, while our bands struck up the grand national air of the Bourbons, "*Vive Henri Quatre*." The French would perhaps have preferred the "march" of Napoleon; but I perceived a flush cross the face of the old Chevalier de Viontessancourt, when the first burst of the air fell upon his ear. The animosity on both sides had evaporated; our hearts were full, and the generous "hurrah" so hard to be restrained, rose to every man's lips as the Frenchmen passed us.

The moment the last file had cleared our ranks, we "shouldered arms;" and, followed by a wing of the Buffs—to prevent the revengeful Calabrians from assaulting them—the French

continued their march to the Tomb of Croton (which, as old Ovid tells us, was the origin of the city), where, by the articles of capitulation, they were to be deprived of all their military insignia. Macleod, with the remainder of his brigade, took possession of the citadel, marching in with the *Amphion's* marines in front; the right being the post of honour generally assigned to that maritime corps. Drumtugas hoisted the British flag, which was saluted by the heavy ordnance of the frigate thundering over the still waters of the gulf, while the echoes of the Strada Larga were yet ringing to the music of the French band.

The Maltese knight, the duca di Bagnara, and cavaliere del Castagno, mounted on true Neapolitan steeds—small, strong, compact, large-headed, and bull-necked, perfect prototypes of the horses in ancient Roman bassi-relievi—brought up the rear with their battalions of the free corps, which immediately broke ranks, and dispersed over the fortress in search of plunder; we had the utmost difficulty in rescuing from their bayonets and daggers the numerous wounded soldiers whom De Bourmont had left behind.

On reaching a pile of ruins called by tradition the Tomb of Croton, and situated near the banks of the *Asaris* of the ancients, the French troops halted and piled arms; the officers dismounting, and the whole marching to a certain distance from the stands of muskets, they surrendered their cannon, colours, and drums, without scathe or damage, to the Ross-shire Buffs, commanded by Major Ferintosh. It was an humiliating act; but the honour of France was saved—the garrison having, in the fullest sense of the term, marched out with “the honours of war.”

The swords of the officers were restored to them, and, with the soldiers, they were permitted to retain their baggage; but the whole were immediately embarked on board the *Amphion*, where they were in safe enough keeping within “the wooden walls of old England.” They were sent to Messina; but were soon after exchanged, and transmitted by cartel to France.

Frà Gaspare—whom I was now more than ever eager to capture, having discovered that he acted the treble part of spy, assassin, and traitor—was not to be found within the fortress. All the efforts of Luca Labbrata, who, encouraged by my promised reward, searched every nook and corner of the fortress—the secret passages, stair-turrets, cells, and dungeons (the architect had provided enough of them all)—were in vain. I was provoked by his want of success. The hunch-

back certainly had not come forth when the garrison marched through the gates; and I could not feel quite at ease under the idea that this vindictive miscreant might still be lurking in one of the numerous holes or hiding-places in the old citadel.

A writer on Italy remarks, that it is a national trait of the Calabrian provincials to be inflamed with the deadliest animosity against any person who discovers or reveals their secret villany. I was well aware of this, and knew that Gaspere Truffi was to be dreaded, rather than despised. But Cavaliere Benedetto soon discovered that De Bourmont, who found the little wretch useful as a spy, had connived at his escape in one of the covered waggons.

"I knew that he was not within the citadel," said Benedetto; "my fellows have searched every hole that would hide even a mouse: not a place between bartizan and dungeon-floor has escaped them; and I could have sworn by our Mother of Loretto,—ay, and the miraculous grot of Capri, to boot,—that they would find him. But, per Baccho! we shall have the cursed gnome in our clutches some other time; and meanwhile, signor, consider yourself safe."

"I am surprised at being so fortunate in escaping his malice so long! He has had so many opportunities, when a shot——"

"No, no, signor," said Castagno, waving his hand disapprovingly; "I may say, with something akin to national vanity, that a Calabrian—though monks and scholars will tell you that he is but a mongrel of Greek, Latin, Lombard, and Saracen blood—can strike with his poniard surely and deeply at close quarters, but would scorn the act of shooting even his bitterest enemy from a distance."

"Our friend the friar is an exception to this rule: I have had ocular demonstration of the fact. It is cowardly assassination any way,—a distinction without a difference."

"But old superstition has rendered it the fashion now-a-days," he rejoined, with a jaunty, careless air, as, bowing, he replaced his cigar, and left me.

That night we had a joyous househeating in the citadel. Our foragers came unexpectedly upon a stock of choice old wine, which De Bourmont had been reserving in some of the cool, dark cellars,—probably for his own particular use. He had, doubtless, come by them as lightly as we did, his soldiers having plundered every house in and about Crotona. But Macleod, his successor, set the casks abroach, and the wine flowed as from a fountain.

His own officers, accustomed to the potent *aqua vite* of their native hills, were seasoned toppers, and imbibed the juice of the "Tuscan grape," and the light wines of Cyprus and Sicily, as if it were water; but most of the *Chasseurs Britanniques*, and the *Amphion's* men, lay beneath the table when the morning sun peeped in upon the scene of their orgies.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER DESPATCH.

ON the evening of the next day, Macleod put into my hand a despatch for the general, containing an account of the capture of Crotona, with a list of the prisoners, stores, and casualties. With this document I had to set out forthwith for the castle of Scylla, where Sir John Stuart, with the brigade of Colonel Oswald, was pushing the siege in person against a French garrison, which made a most resolute defence. The French soldiers were commanded by the marchese di Monteleone, who, by some unaccountable means, had passed the piquets of the Masse, and contrived to reach the fortress from the distant camp at Cassano; his known bravery well entitled him to assume the command.

At first I was chagrined at the idea of a journey of more than a hundred miles, through such an extraordinary country; but, understanding that Marco of Casteltermo had offered to be my guide and companion by the way (and on my return, if necessary), I looked forward to the long ride as a probable source of pleasant and exciting adventures; for every day brought forth something new and stirring during our campaign in these turbulent provinces, and every rood of ground over which we marched was rich in the recollections of the past.

The morning gun aroused me next day by dawn, and with alacrity I quitted my couch, which consisted of nothing more luxurious than a wooden bench and my horse-cloak.

Through the open iron lattice, the brightening east gave promise of another glorious Italian day; a cold, grey light spread over the sky, distinctly revealing the most distant points of the scenery, even so far as the peaks of Santa Severina (famous for that wine which Pliny of old so much commended), and the little city of Strongoli, perched on the

summit of a lofty mountain, rising up abruptly from the shores of the Ionian Sea. The sun was yet far below the horizon, and the streets of Crotona, the dark courts, and blood-stained walls of the citadel, were yet gloomy, silent, and still. Masses of shattered masonry, splinters of shells, scattered shot, broken gun-carriages, with here and there a corpse which our fatigue-parties had not yet removed, and coagulated pools of blood, crusted on the pavement of platform and parapet, yet met the eye, attesting the valour of the garrison and the slaughter of the siege. With his plaid and feathers fluttering on the breeze, a sentinel of the Ross-shire Buffs trod to and fro by the flag-staff; and the hour being early, and no one stirring, he chanted a song, to cheer his lonely post; he sang of a land which had more charms for him than bright Ansonia, and his thoughts were amid the pathless glens and savage solitudes of Ross.

The clatter of hoofs on the pavement, as our horses were led into the court, and the appearance of the tall figure of il cavaliere di Malta, muffled in an ample black cloak with a scarlet cross, and booted and spurred for the road, made me hurry forth to meet him.

"Now, signor," said Marco, as he put his foot in the stirrup, "look well to your girths and pistols, for we may have often to trust more to our horses' heels and a flying shot than to downright valour. Many a mile of wild wood, deep morass, mountain gorge, and desert plain, must be passed between this and Scylla, and it is very unlikely that we shall be permitted to travel so far without having a brawl of some kind."

"I trust your provincial gentlemen of the road will not find us quite unprepared, at all events," said I, leaping into my saddle, and examining my holsters.

"Basta! for myself I care little, being able to keep any man at arm's length; but in a gorge like La Sylva, hedged by the rifles of a thousand banditti, the wisest policy is to take off one's hat. The country through which we must pass swarms with the followers of Scarolla, Frà Diavolo, Benincasa, Gaetano Mammone, and, lastly, the terrible Francatripa, the king of St. Eufemio."

"And on each of these matchless vagabonds the court of Palermo has bestowed the star of St. Constantino and a colonel's commission!"

"On all, save the horrible Scarolla."

"But Francatripa is said to be chivalrous and brave, and a perfect hero of romance, though a mountain robber."

"You may chance to find him an incarnate fiend!" said Castelermo, as we rode off: "ay, worse than a fiend, if it suits his humour; and as for chivalry, basta! I cannot see any in a bearded capobandito, with Satan in his heart, and a belt round him, garnished with poniards and pistols. Yet Francastripa's actions are formed after a noble model; it is his greatest pride to be considered like poor Marco Sciarra, re della Campagna."

"He was a prince among Italian bandits! I remember having read that once, in the mountains of Abruzzo, his band plundered a poor wayfarer, whom they bound with cords, and brought before him."

"Well, signor," said the robber king, 'what are you?'

"Only a poor poet, Messer Marco."

"Good!" replied the other, his frown relaxing. 'Your name?'

"Torquato Tasso, of Sorrento."

"What! the author of——"

"Gierusalemme Liberata," said the prisoner, bowing profoundly. A shout of acclamation burst from the band, and the 'king of the open country' knelt on the sod, kissed the hand of the poet, and, restoring to him his baggage, escorted him in person beyond the dangerous passes of the mountains."

"All this, and much more, I have heard in the nursery; but as neither of us happen to be a Tasso, and king Marco has long since gone to the shades, any adventure we may have with his successors and imitators will not terminate so pleasantly. Look there, signor, and behold a competition of minstrels! Hark! we shall hear music equalling the pipe of Hermes!"

Under the vine-covered verandah of a cantina, sat six or eight of the Chasseurs Britanniques and Free Calabrians, who, by the red appearance of their eyes, had evidently been carousing all night, and were yet dreaming over their half-drained flagons; while the empty jars, cards, and dice, scattered on the board, informed us that they had enjoyed the night so merrily that they were not yet inclined to separate.

An itinerant performer on the zampogna, or Italian bagpipe, was playing for the entertainment of the drowsy revelers, when a gigantic Scot, in dark tartan, one of Macleod's segmental pipers, passed by, on his way to the Strada Larga, to play a rouse for the soldiers billeted there. Stopping before the cantina, the Scottish piper surveyed with surprise and curiosity the little chanter and inflated skin of the Calabrian's primitive bagpipe; while, at the music of this feeble reed, the

face of the Highlander gradually contracted, from a ludicrous expression of wonder, to a formidable scowl of Gaelic contempt. He threw the three long drones of the great war-pipe over his left shoulder, and puffing up its mighty bag, in an instant poured forth the wild northern pibroch of the race of Seaforth. The strange variations and tremendous din of the Highland bagpipe astounded the poor little zampognatore, whose notes were lost amid the shrill and sonorous tempest which poured forth so volubly from the pipe of the Highlander, whom he regarded for a time with a droll look of silent wonder, and then slunk away, retreating backwards, while his stalwart rival strode after him, taking step for step, and blowing fiercely, as he literally "walked into" the discomfited Italian.

Discordant as the "war-note" of clan Kenneth must have been to the nice Italian ear of Castelfermo, he would fain have stayed to listen; but his fiery Neapolitan horse had no such inclination; after snorting and prancing, it set off at a speed which soon left far behind the towers and ramparts of Crotona.

During the cool morning, our ride was a very pleasant one, as the road lay through a level part of the country, covered with rich crops, and studded with little villages and olive groves, interspersed with lofty elms, and clumps of pale-green willow overhanging gurgling rivulets; but the scene changed as we penetrated among the mountains, where we rode on for miles without encountering a human being, save perhaps some smoke-begrimed charcoal-burner, or bandit-like peasant, in pursuit of the red deer, which abound in those wild places. At times the road wound between the green and solitary hills, through gorges like the bed of a dried-up river, where the rocks frowned grimly, rising up on each side, like walls of basalt or iron; but they were not devoid of beauty, for in their clefts flourished the daphne and the rhododendron, blue monk's hood, pink foxglove, and the whortleberry; while the bronze masses of dark Italian pines shed their sombre influence over the scene from the summit of the cliffs above.

The scorching heat soon compelled us to take shelter in the hut of a shepherd during the sultry noon. We met him on the lonely mountains with his flock of goats, the tinkle of whose brass bells awoke the echoes of the hollow valley whence they were ascending. He walked lazily in front, playing drowsily on the zampogna, and the herded flock followed in close order behind, drawn after him either by the charms of his pipe, or by the dread of a sharp-nosed sheep-

dog, with long white hair, who formed the rearguard, and watched his fleecy charge, with red, ferret-like eyes. His poor cabin could afford us nothing more than a morsel of coarse cake, a handful of olives, and the manna, or congealed dew, which in the morning is gathered on the mulberry-leaves in Calabria; in lieu of wine, we had a draught of the limpid water that gurgled from a rustic fount, supplying the duct, or hollowed tree, that lay before the door, and was half buried in the turf, for the convenience of his flock.

The shepherd was clad in a doublet and waistcoat of rough, undressed skins, with the wool outside, fastened by ties of thong or horn buttons; red cotton breeches, and a broad-leaved hat of plaited straw, adorned with a clay image of the Madonna; long uncombed locks waved in sable masses on his brawny breast and muscular neck, which, like his legs and feet, were sunburnt and bare; a pouch and knife hung at his girdle, and his face, which, perhaps, had never been touched by a razor, was fringed by a short and thick black beard. In ideas and manners, he was, perhaps, little different from the shepherds who inhabited these very mountains when the trumpets of Hannibal awoke their echoes; only he prayed not to "thundering Jove," but to Madonna, believed in the miracles of St. Hugh and the holy Eufemio, instead of the amours and valorous deeds of Pan, and kept Lent in lieu of the *Lupercalia* of the Latins.

"Everything here seems centuries behind northern Italy, in the march of civilization," I observed to my friend and cicerone.

"Truly we have got amongst fauns and satyrs here," replied Castelermo, as he drank from a pitcher of cold water with no very satisfied air. "Basta! was the Arcadia of Virgil like this? Hark you, Signor Menalcas (if that be your name), does not the villa Belcastro lie somewhere near these wild mountains?"

"Yes, illustrissimo," replied the poor rustic, quite abashed by the hauteur of the Maltese knight; "about a league beyond the Tacina, among the wooded hills."

"Good! I hope we shall procure better quarters and entertainment than this poor den can afford."

"I have been often plundered by the French marauders, signor," said the goatherd, humbly.

"And this villa Belcastro; do you know the way to it?"

"Yes, Signor Cavaliere; but a thousand golden ducats would not bribe me to be your guide thither!"

"Why so, fool?"

"My shoulders ache at the recollection of the scurviada. The cavaliere di Belcastro——"

"Has a very bad name in the neighbourhood. Ah! I heard that even at Palermo. And so, Signor Sylvanus——"

"My name is Renzo Grelle," said the herd, angrily. "The sbirri at the villa allow no one to approach within rifle-shot of the gates; as the noble signor makes the French war a pretext for many an act of oppression. I was scourged like a mule for leading a poor monk of Cassano there a few days ago; and yet, perhaps, he proved no unwelcome guest. Whom think you he was, illustrissimo? Why, the great marchese di Monteleone in disguise, and on his way to Seylla! Madonna! I discovered that afterwards, when he was beyond the reach of my knife! His excellency of Belcastro can act the robber, as well as the king of St. Eufemia. But, perhaps, the less I say the safer for myself, and I trust to your honour in being scatheless for what I have said already. His dungeons are deep, and I am but a poor peasant, whom he might crush by a word."

"At this age of the world, can such things be?" asked I, touched by the poor man's terror and humility. "A devil of a fellow, this; we will pay him a visit out of pure spite. What say you, Signor Marco?"

"By all means," replied the cavalier, as we took the road again. "His sbirri will scarcely dare to fire on me; and we can make our quarters good in the king's name. Basta! let Signor Belcastro look to himself, if swords are drawn; I believe I have met him before, and if my suspicions are just, I shall not spare steel on him."

"There is, then, some story connected with him?"

"And to the old tune,—Italian jealousy. He is said to be married to a beautiful Neapolitan, whom he espoused during a sudden love-fit; but in consequence of some trifling affair when residing at Venice during the carnival, he became inflamed with jealousy, like an old-fashioned husband of the 'Ancient Tales,' and poniarded an officer of the Dogale guard. Bringing his lady into this wild country, he has ever since kept her a close prisoner, and held himself in such strict seclusion, that his residence was unmolested by the French, but only because it was unknown to them; or perhaps he is an ally; for Buonaparte, anxious to root out from Italy the last traces of the feudal system, has given Regnier orders to demolish every castle and fortified villa in the Calabrias. In one of these ancient dwellings, which can easily be made a strong place for defence, Belcastro keeps his beautiful wife a

close captive. I doubt not but she has been perfidious; in the course of my intrigues with the sex, I have found more than one woman so!"

"I have always heard, signor, that you were somewhat too sarcastic on the good faith of your dark-eyed countrywomen."

"By Sant Ermo! I have cause to be so," he replied, while his dark brows contracted, as they always did when he was in the least excited, and his eyes sparkled fire from beneath the shade of his black velvet baretta, or forage-cap, which was adorned with the Maltese cross, and the letters I. H. S. in red enamel. "There was a time," he continued, half communing with himself, "when I was the gayest cavalier on the Corse of Naples, or the Marina of Palermo. It was generally allowed that none dressed more gaily, rode more gracefully, played and drank more deeply, than Marce of Castelterme. No man's opinion went further in all matters of taste, fashion, or dissipation, whether it was given on a new collection of antiques or paintings, a choice of wines, a race-horse, a new carriage, or the belle of the season. My word was a fiat in the fashionable world. Basta! I was not then a commander of Malta. God and St. John forgive me! if it was rather in a sinful spirit of revenge and chagrin, than a holy sentiment of veneration and religion, that I girded on the sword and mantle of that most sacred brotherhood. There is a pleasure, a morbid one though it be, in telling one's griefs; and since you have half acknowledged to me your passion for the fair cousin of my friend Santugo" (I had never told this sharp-sighted Italian a word about it), "I should not behave with more reserve to you."

He paused for a moment; old recollections, long forgotten but once-cherished sentiments, hopes and fears, arose in quick array before him, and his dark and noble features became flushed, as with that lively frankness which so often characterizes the better classes of his countrymen, he commenced to follow

CHAPTER XIX.

NARRATIVE OF CASTELIERMO.

It was in the church of the Holy Spirit at Naples, during vespers, that I first beheld Despina Vignola, then in the first year of her novitiate. It is said that the beauty of our Italian women soon fades; it may be so: I am no traveller, and cannot judge; but all must acknowledge that their charms, while they last, are often truly dazzling. Such were Despina's. To me she seemed a personification of all that is lovely in woman; her bright brown hair was gathered up behind, in many an ample braid, while a mass of glossy ringlets clustered round her high, pale forehead, and waved on her fair neck. A robe of white satin fell in deep broad folds around her figure, leaving her polished shoulders and taper arms uncovered, from the braceleted wrist to the dimpled elbow. The graces of her person were displayed to the utmost advantage by the richness of her attire; for it was not the custom of the fashionable convent of Santo Spirito to robe the novices in the grim paraphernalia of the cloister; until the vows were taken, they always appeared at mass in full dress.

Despina was formed for love and life, not for the nun's veil and cloistered cell, to which, according to a custom too common in Italian families, she had been vowed in infancy by her parents. It was my fate to love her passionately and truly, when few others would have dared to look impurely upon the affianced bride of heaven—one from her childhood vowed to Madonna. She was an orphan, and her guardians—an avaricious aunt, and Ser Vignola, a rascally notary of the Strada di Toledo—to procure the reversion of her little patrimony, kept before her continually the enormity of not fulfilling the vows of her parents.

In Italy, one is more prone to fall in love at church than any other place; this may perhaps account for the numerous intrigues of our female ecclesiastics. There is a mysterious influence in our religious service—a mixture of heavenly aspirations and earth-born delights, which powerfully awakens the better feelings of our nature, softening the heart and rendering it more sensitive to tender and lasting impressions. Was it not at church that Petrarch first beheld the bright-haired Laura, whose beauty shed a light on his pilgrimage

through life for twenty years after? Ah, signor! our holy religion belongs to the days of poetry and romance!

None but an Italian can know what a first love is to an Italian heart, or how ardently and wildly the tender passion burns beneath these sunny skies. In those days, I was a young *alfiero* (or ensign), in Florestan's battalion of the Guards, and my daily attendance at the church of Spirito Santo soon became a standing jest at our mess, and a topic for laughter to my gay companions, who were quite at a loss to comprehend the reason of such sudden and rigid attendance to the duties of religion. An aged aunt of mine, who departed about that time in all the glory of virginity, out of her admiration of my piety, put a codicil to her will, by which 50,000 ducats became mine, instead of being poured into the treasury of the Greek Padri of St. Basil, as she had first intended.

While kneeling beside the envious iron *grille*, which separated me from Despina, and kept all profane sinners from the vicinity of the fair vestals, I felt happiness even at being so near her—to hear her soft breathing, her low responses, and the rustle of her satin dress—to watch the heaving breast, the long lashes of the downcast eye, and the beauty of those auburn ringlets, which seemed “interwoven by the fingers of love!” as Petrarch has it. O, Madonna mia! these were the pure aspirations of a young and gallant heart. But, alas! how were they responded to?—how requited? I will not trouble you with much more of this; though love quickens a fertile imagination, and I could relate a thousand devices formed to gain the attention of the beautiful novice, which all proved vain. She kept her long eyelashes cast down, and her bright eyes obstinately fixed on the monotonous pages of her mass-book, which she affected to prefer to the gayest cavalier on the Corso, for such I considered myself in those days of youth and vanity; and certainly my cap had the tallest feather, my belt the longest sword, and my uniform the smartest cut in all Naples. We all know how passion is inflamed by difficulty, and from the time she left the church after vespers, until the moment of beholding her again at matins, ages seemed to elapse; but they were ages of scheming, contrivance, and stratagem.

The abbess, who was Despina's near relative, soon suspected the object of my devotion was an earthly, and not a heavenly virgin; she was an acute Calabrian, and watched me attentively; in short, the fair novice appeared at matins, mass, and vespers no more.

But the ingenuity of Monsignore Cupid is fully a match for all the cold precautions of guardians and enemies. Daily and nightly I came with my friend Santugo (then a joyous student, fresh from the University of Naples), to survey the lofty walls, the iron portal, and grated loopholes of the convent, with the faint hope of beholding her; but, *corpo di Baccio!* we might as well have looked down the crater of Vesuvius, the flames from whose summit often lighted up our nightly patrols. In short, signor, with a key of gold I gained over the portress, who conveyed to Despina a most elaborately written letter; a ring, bearing her initials, D. V., was my only answer. *Croce di Malta!* Even at this distant hour, the recollection of the joyous moment when I first received it, stirs up a tumult within me! After that, we used to meet in the convent garden every night, but only for a few moments.

Dupe that I was to believe this creature loved me! But ah! the happiness of those brief visits will never pass away from my memory. I found Despina as attractive in mind and manners as she was charming in person; she was a joyous donzella, who knew better the poems of Alfieri and Corilla than the doggrel hymns of the Padri; and while we enjoyed our tête-à-tête in an arbour, Santugo kept watch, perched on the summit of the garden-wall. Often we cursed the villain notary, who lent all his influence to crush the blossoms of so fair a flower, but at last my passion took a more noisy turn.

By Santugo's advice, I engaged all the improvisatori in the city to celebrate Despina. I mustered twenty with mandolins, twenty choristers, as many bell-ringers and scrapers on the viol, with all our regimental drums and cymbals. O, what a jovial company! Every other night we entertained the sisterhood with a grand serenade, making all Naples echo with bursts of joyous music, until the abbess, deeming her "commandery" disgraced by our clatter and chortling, procured a guard of *sbirri* from the bishop of Cosenza (whose palace unluckily stood in the adjoining street), and on the first night after this reinforcement, we were greeted by a volley of blunderbuss-shot, which was within a hair's breadth of sending us all to the banks of the Styx. Three choristers were killed, and several wounded. Santugo escaped unhurt, but I was peppered with slugs so severely, that for the next two months I was confined to my apartments, and in the interval Despina took the veil! She either supposed I was

dead of my wounds or deemed me inconstant. Perhaps it was dire necessity, as the last day of her novitiate had expired; and, after a short residence at the house of the notary, to take a last view of the world (as the custom is), she returned to offer up her vows. All the bells of Naples were tolling on the occasion; several novices were to take the veil that day, and the fashionables flocked to the church of the Holy Spirit, as to some great festival of joy.

"O Madonna!" exclaimed poor Marco, beating his breast with true Italian energy, "will the bitter recollections of that infernal morning never pass away?" The princess of Squilaci, a damsel old in years, wickedness, and fashionable dissipation, was also to take the vows; and all the foolish city, from Portici on the east, to Misenum on the west, held it as a day of universal joy.

While all this was going on, you cannot imagine the agony of mind I endured; weaker than a child, I was prostrated upon a sick-bed, by a long and wasting illness. My brain was dizzy. I wondered how the sun could shine so joyously on the bay and the city, which lies so magnificently along its spacious margin; to me it was a day of gloomy horror! The bells seemed to toll for the funeral of Despina. My mind was a chaos, and I would have hailed an eruption of Vesuvius, an earthquake, or any horrible convulsion which would have overwhelmed the whole city; but neither came to pass, and I lay stretched on my fever-bed, helpless, forgotten, and miserable. I drank cup after cup of wine, but there seemed a fire within me, which all the waters of the bay would not quench. The pain of my wounds, the wine I drank so rashly, and the fever of mind and body, soon made me delirious, and Santugo alone restrained me from sallying, sword in hand, into the crowded streets, to search for some imaginary foe.

That night, while yet the fever raged within me, and my brain whirled with the champagne I had drunk, I arose, dressed, and armed myself, and issuing forth, soon found my way to the closed gates of the convent. The streets were silent and dark; my thoughts were strange; even while my head swam and my knees tottered, I imagined that I had the strength of a Hercules. Aware that I was mad with fever and wine, my pranks had some of the caution of sanity in them, and I shrank beneath the deep shadow of the cloisters when a passenger approached, or the moon streamed its light

between the fleecy clouds, which the south-west wind piled in gleaming masses over Naples.

At times I laughed bitterly; anon I wrung my hands, and cried aloud, "Despina—Despina! Anima mia!" and chanted some of our merry madrigals, till the hollow cloisters and the long vista of the empty street, gave back the ravings of folly and despair.

A new fit seized me; I became gloomy, and fled from the city, to wander among the ruins of Queen Joanna's palace, a place rendered terrible to the superstitious fishermen by the tales of horror connected with it. From thence I wandered as far as that dreaded valley, the Forum Vulcani, a spot filled with fabled terrors from time immemorial, and shunned by the vulgar of Naples. The superstition is, that it is haunted by fiends and spirits, who toil and shriek through caverns of fire, watching that hidden gold, which (by day) the wretched lazzaroni have sought for centuries. At times the ground is covered with burning sulphur, and rent with chasms, belching forth pitchy smoke, flames, or boiling water, which the fabled giants who are buried there vomit up from hell. Petrus Damianus supposes that purgatory lies beneath it, and tells of frightful noises, groans, and shrieks, issuing from clefts in the rocks, whereon sat monstrous shapes of birds and men, who, on the croaking of a gigantic raven, plunged headlong into the chasms, and appeared no more, at least, not for many days.

At night, when viewed by the light of a setting moon or the flame of Vesuvius, the Forum Vulcani, with only its natural terrors, is gloomy enough; hemmed in by rocks of basalt, from the clefts of which the burning bitumen flashes forth at times, or white steam curls on the breeze—the ground thick with sulphur, and trembling with the throes of the mighty volcano in the distance, it has horrors enough for ordinary men; but that night it had none for me, and I startled the echoes of its rocks with my cries of "Despina!"

I again found myself beneath the convent walls of Spirito Santo, just as the city clocks were tolling midnight; I was alone, and a strange thought occurred to me. I tore down a lamp, and demolishing a wooden railing, poured oil on the painted pales, and piling them against the door, set them on fire, laughing, and shouting "Despina!" as I fanned the flames with my hat; and when the blaze increased apace, I folded my arms within my mantle, and watched its rapid progress with the most intense satisfaction. Aim or object I

had none; I was *mad*!—and yet I can remember the whole, like some wild dream. The forked tongues of flame shot upward, and licked the wooden balconies and projecting eaves of the old convent, which was likely to be soon enveloped in fire. Its magnificent oratory, with columns of jasper and dome of marble—its shrines, tombs, and relics—the miraculous crucifix which spoke to Thomas Aquinas, the true cross, the Virgin's petticoat, and Heaven knows what more—now stood in greater peril than ever they did during the outrages of the mad fisherman of Amalfi.

The lazzaroni came yelling in thousands from every point; the whole Strada di Toledo was red with the blaze, and the Piazza di Mercato, and the façade of the royal palace, were all gleaming in light; even the starry vault above was sheeted with sparkling fire. Basta! how I laughed at the roaring flames and the clanking engines, from which the hissing water poured in streams—at the shrieking nuns, the shouting mob, and all the mingled dismay and uproar I had so suddenly caused. But, being soon discovered to be the author of the mischief, I was carried off by the Neapolitan guard, and lodged in prison; where three months' close confinement, with no other fare than hard crusts and cold water, cooled my blood so completely, that I came forth an altered man, and so heartily ashamed of my late extravaganzas, that I resigned to the duca di Florestan my commission in his battalion of the Guards, and left the service.

With liberty, all my love for Despina returned; and circumstances which followed soon after raised my passion to its former height and ardour. One morning, on awaking, I found a little coloured billet laid on my pillow; tearing it open with hurried and trembling hands, I found it to be an invitation—from whom?—the Signora Abadessa of Spirito Santo, to visit her at my earliest convenience. How the little pink note came there, no one knew; and I was too much fluttered to inquire. There was an air of mystery in the affair that pleased me, and love and hope sprang up again. But aware that I had the treachery and revenge of a Calabrian woman to dread, together with the wrath of her gossip and well-known admirer the famous bishop of Cosenza, I went well armed, taking a matchless poniard of Bastia steel in addition to my concealed pistols. Happily, however, such precautions were needless. I found the gay abbess an agreeable little woman; she gave me her hand to kiss, and welcomed me with a pleasant talkative manner which quite won me to her purpose. After rebuking me gently for my

sacrilegious attempt to fire her convent, she bade me kneel to receive her blessing. I listened to her rebuke and received her benison in silence and distrust, wondering the whole time how so unusual an interview was to end. I thought of the bishop's sbirri, and the dungeons of the convent below us, and kept one hand in my bosom grasping my poniard.

The reverend lady began by a long preamble on the risk she ran in the disclosure she was about to make regarding the sister Brigida, as she named Despina; and then, making a long pause, she kept me on thorns of expectation, while observing with a keen glance the expression of my care-worn visage. I could not love Despina (the abbess continued) more than I was beloved in return; and, taking pity upon me, she had consented to quit the convent, and became my bride, the moment I procured her a dispensation from those vows which bound her to the church—vows offered up on the expiry of her novitiate, and in an agony of sorrow for my supposed death. Blessed words! But they were my ruin! My brain whirled and my heart leaped with delight; throwing myself at the feet of the abbess, and pressing both her hands to my lips, I declared her my best friend—my good angel, and bestowed on her a thousand of those titles which flow so smoothly from an Italian's tongue, when his heart is overflowing with gratitude.

She rang a hand-bell, and the light form of Despina appeared at the iron grating of the parlour. I sprang towards her, but she averted her face; at first it was very pale, and seemed more lovely beneath the dark hood which shaded it; but a mantling blush overspread her cheek, as she gave me her hand through the grating to kiss.

"Ah, Despina! had you trusted more to Providence, how much sorrow might have been spared us both!"

"True, dear one," said she, wafting me a kiss through the grate.

The superior hurried me away, and I left the convent giddy with delight at the sudden turn fortune had taken in my favour. Within the hour, I wrote to my uncle, the great Cardinal Ruffo, to intercede with his Holiness, and procure a dispensation for Despina; and I spent nearly my whole inheritance in bribing the greedy officials at the papal court to hasten it, trusting to God and my own hands for the means of maintenance when Despina became mine. Meanwhile, I visited the convent daily, and though my interviews with her were very short, I became more than ever enchanted with her

beauty and vivacity, which seemed to increase as the time flew past, and the day of her freedom and our happiness drew nearer.

Often have I whiled away the hours of a starry night in the Toledo, watching the taper which flickered in her dormitory; and I retired happy if I did but obtain even a glance of her figure passing the lattice. One night, while watching thus, a tall, dark shadow fell on the muslin curtains of the window; it was *not* that of Despina. I paused—horrible suspicions floated before me, and I felt my blood run cold. The light vanished, the chamber became dark, and immediately a tall fellow dropped from the window into the street. My heart, which had ceased to beat for a time, was now on fire; the blood shot through my veins like lightning; my poniard gleamed in my hand.

"Ohi, signor cavaliere!" cried I, crossing his path; "who are you that leaves the convent thus, and under the shadow of night?"

"One who will not brook questioning by you, whoever you are, per Baccho!" replied the other, drawing his hat over his eyes, and standing on his guard, with a poniard also. "Let me pass, cursed lazzarone, or it may be the worse for you."

Jealousy, anguish, and hatred, burned fiercely within me, and I rushed upon him with frantic vehemence. Parrying his blow with my mantle, I, with truer aim, slashed up his face from cheek to chin. My antagonist fled, uttering a terrible malediction.

"Basta!" said I, while wiping my weapon, "he is only some craven robber after all! Thank heaven! my suspicions were vain. But her window!—I must have mistaken it,—and yet the shadow—." A tumult of sad thoughts overwhelmed me, and I slept none that night, but wandered about the Toledo like a houseless dog. Sunrise found me at the parlour grate of the convent.

Despina appeared as usual, her eyes beaming with smiles, expressive of equal pleasure and surprise, on beholding me so early. The fair recluse, who had just arisen from her pure and peaceful couch, seemed so blooming, so fragrant, with beauty, youth, and innocence, that I cursed my vile suspicions, and concluded the strange visitor of the convent to have been a robber.

Three days afterwards, my uncle, the Cardinal Ruffo, sent a dispensation for Despina to the convent. I heard of its arrival, and, with a heart brimming with exultation, I flew to

embrace my innamorata. On hearing my well-known ring at the bell of the porch, Despina was not, as usual, at the grate, nor did the superior appear, but a letter from her lay on the table for me. I tore it open, and read the fatal confirmation of my suspicions: I found that I was the dupe of two of the most artful and inexplicable women in Italy. Despina had eloped! The moment her dispensation had arrived, she quitted the convent in a calesso, accompanied by a *masked cavalier*, and was gone, no one knew whither. The letter concluded by a request that I would visit the convent no more, as the abbess was too much incensed at Despina Vignola, to make welcome any one who had ever loved or been connected with her.

The next thing I remembered, was finding myself in the sunny Toledo, and hearing the jarring of the convent's iron doors, as they were closed and locked behind me. I tore the letter to fragments, which I scattered on the wind, and rushed through the streets, to order forth horses and servants in pursuit,—servant, I should say, for my retinue was then curtailed to one. I thought only of revenge. O, signor! little can you imagine the agony of rage and shame I endured; not, perhaps, so much from unrequited love, as from wounded vanity and pride. Next morning, all gossiping Naples rang with the story, and everybody enjoyed a laugh at the famous jilt of the cavaliere di Castelfermo, by a perfidious little nun,—per Baccho!

A letter, which I received next day from Cardinal Ruffo, containing abundance of good advice, and his blessing on our nuptials, in no way tended to soothe my exasperation. Basta! months elapsed before the shock of this event passed away, and I could listen with calmness to Santugo, who related to me the story of Despina, so far as he had been able to pick it up in the public places of the city.

I had been most cruelly and strangely duped. Anxious to be free from those religious trammels which her parents' bigotry and her guardian's avarice had cast around her, the artful girl—who had never loved me—was willing that I should employ all my interest (which was great), and my money (which, alas! was little), to procure her a dispensation, that she might espouse the brother of that diavolessa, the superior. He was a ruined cavalier of the Calabrias, who had lost his last ducat at the hells, and to whom the reversion of her entry-money from the convent treasury would be very acceptable, though the beauty of the girl was temptation enough.

"Basta!" said I, "Santugo, 'tis enough!" I inquired after her and her choice no more, but strove to banish the affair from my mind, when the first burst of my fury had passed away. Luckily, I had been taught philosophy, and, bequeathing to the devil my share in the sex, found that I had not much more to bestow: I had not a quattrino, save what I raised by the sale of the remnant of my patrimony,—the tower of St. Ermo, in the upper province. Santugo would have shared his last ducat with me, but I was too proud to be dependent on any man. My legacy, the reward of my devotion, had all melted away, too, during my joyous life in the Guards: it was spent in procuring a wife for another man. I wish him joy of his spouse: if she proved as virtuous after marriage as she was before it, she must be a crown—but not of glory—to her husband. Basta!

Finding myself without one beggarly bajoccho to clink upon another, I became a soldier again, and served the knights of Malta, as a musketeer, against the corsairs of Barbary. On the return of our frigate to Malta, after a most successful cruise, in which we obtained abundance of plunder, slaves, and glory, I was admitted into the Italian Langue, on proving before a chapter of the order that my blood had been noble for two hundred years (easy enough for one who comes of a senatorial family), and that in my coat armonial there were the blazons of four patrician houses. A little prize-money, picked up in Algeria, furnished me with two hundred and sixty golden crowns, to pay my fees of diploma on passing from esquire to the rank of spurred and belted knight. In this capacity, when in command of a frigate, I defeated Osmin Carara, the celebrated corsair, who so long infested these seas, and for that exploit I was made bailiff of the commandery at St. Eufemio, then consisting of sixty knights, the noblest in Italy.

So, signor, you now behold me a brother of the most reverend and illustrious order of St. John of Jerusalem, once of Rhodes, and latterly of Malta. After the reduction, by Buonaparte, of that barren rock (the last stronghold of the order), I retired, with his most eminent highness the grand master, and the poor remnant of our forces, to Genoa, where our solemn chapters are yet held. On the breaking out of the Italian war, when the French crossed our frontier to plant their banner of blood and anarchy on the ramparts of Rome,—to assail God's vicegerent in his own eternal city, drive the Bourbon king from Naples, hoist their red cap above the winged horse, and establish a republic of injustice and

tyranny,—then I once more girded on the sword, and have ever since been fighting,—at one time under the chiefs of the *Masse*, at another under the British ; but, alas ! oftener under *Francotripi*, and other bold bandits of Naples, who seem to be the only men truly staunch to Italy in these days of war and peril. Malediction on the hour when a wearer of this blessed badge has to stoop to a companionship so unworthy ! But the end sanctifies the means. * * *

There is the villa Belcastro ! If my story has beguiled a part of the way through this wild and mountainous country, I shall consider myself amply repaid in having pleased you ; but I fear, Signor Claude, you have found it dry enough, though the tale is a sad one to me,—the most dismal chapter of my history, indeed.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VILLA BELCASTRO.

“WHERE is the path ? It seems lost in the wilderness hereabout,” said I, when my communicative friend had concluded.

“Yonder woman at the fountain will perhaps show us the way to the gate. Permit me to pass,” replied the cavalier, as he spurred his horse to the front, and galloped before me ; his tall military figure, and peculiar garb and equipment, with the solitary wild around us,—the castellated villa, and the lonely hills,—had an air of romance with which my red coat, jack-boots, and most unchivalric cocked-hat, but ill consorted.

The country through which we had travelled was of the most picturesque character : lofty mountains rose up against the blue vault, which they seemed to sustain ; they were covered to their summits with the light foliage of the olive, the heavy branches of the sombre pine, the broad masses of the glossy-leaved *ilex*, fragrant myrtle, rich *arbutus*, orange and lemon groves, all flourishing in the wildest luxuriance ; while the aloe, the cactus, and date-palm, grew among the ferruginous rocks in profusion. Little hamlets, inhabited only by charcoal-burners, nestled in lonely nooks ; solitary chapels, old crosses, marking deeds of blood or piety, and the mouldering ruins of long-departed races,—the Calabrian or the Locri,

—appeared half-hidden amid the long reedy grass, in the flat alluvial vales through which the roadway wound.

But on nearing the villa Belcastro a change came over the scenery; the country seemed deserted, or inhabited only by the lynx, the wolf, and wild boar; muddy cascades roared down over the red scaurs of the mountains, and a wide pathless wood of dark Italian pines and tall cypresses, sombre and gloomy, surrounded the ancient edifice. The picturesque towers of the villa were perched on the summit of a rock that reared up its jagged front immediately before us; but we were unable to penetrate the tangled growth of underwood that intervened, so thickly interwoven with creeping wild plants that it seemed like an Indian jungle. Buffaloes—a species of cattle introduced into Italy during the seventh century—browsed in the marshy places, and at times a lynx or polecat shot through the forest, or an eagle screamed from the rocks.

The white walls and striking façade of the villa shone in the warm light of the western sky, and from one of the four turrets at the angles of the edifice, which were covered with elaborate stonework projecting like a heavy cornice, we saw a standard slowly hoisted and unfurled to the breeze. Our scarlet uniforms had probably led the inmates to suppose that British troops were in the valley below.

“Basta!” exclaimed Castelermo, “’tis the veritable castle of an ogre, this! Cavaliere Galdino must be seldom troubled with visitors. I see not a trace of road or pathway to his hermitage on the cliffs yonder.”

“I trust we shall reach it before nightfall; a ride in the dark through such a wilderness would not be very pleasant, and evening is closing fast.”

While I was speaking, the last segment of the sun’s crimson disk sank behind the green ridge of hills from which we had descended; the long, dark shadow cast by the villa-crowned rock across the wooded valley faded away; the Apennines grew dark, and the sombre tints of evening deepened rapidly.

“Signora,” said Castelermo to an old woman who was filling a jar at a fountain, and whose grim aspect declared her to be the spouse of a charcoal-burner, “is there any path to the villa on this side of the mountains?”

“Through the woods there is a way, signor cavaliere,” said the woman, setting down her jar, and endeavouring to hide her bare bosom, for her attire was of the most wretched description, “but it is a troublesome road, and perilous too; and you

will only lose your labour, for none get entrance there. The sbirri keep guard day and night with their rifles loaded, and more than one poor peasant has been shot—mistaken for a Frenchman, perhaps."

"So the cavaliere yet contrives to maintain his quota of sbirri in arms?" said Marco.

"Yes, signor illustrissimo," replied the poor woman, glancing furtively round her; "but ahimé! such ruffians! They are slaves who have escaped, bravoos, banditti, and the worst malefactors of Naples, who wear his livery; and, bearing arms in his name, they commit such outrages that the very relation would make you shudder, cavalieri!"

"A droll country gentleman!" I exclaimed. "And he will not admit any one, say you?"

"None, save the accursed witches, who come all the way from the peak of Fiesole to hold their Sabbath with him."

"Ay! and devils from the Val di Demona, to bring distempers on our blessed infants!" cried another hag, starting up from behind the fountain, where she had shrunk down to conceal the scantiness of her attire, which consisted only of a red sottana, or coarse petticoat, and leather sandals; "and to blast our crops and herds, and make the fiends who dwell in the bowels of the mountains rend the solid earth, and shake our huts to pieces."

"Madonna! speak lower! he is told whatever is said of him by the sibyl of Norcia, who made him proof against fire, and steel, and water."

"I care not. I am alone in the world now; my husband died on Regnier's gibbet at Monteleone, and my sons have perished fighting under the chiefs of the Masse, Giseù Cristo! I am old, lonely, and very miserable!"

"Proof against steel, did you say, signora?" said I, addressing the first gossip; "we may test that, if he plays any of his pranks with us."

"Signor, heard you ever such stuff?" exclaimed Casteltermo, while our horses drank of the well, and we enjoyed a hearty laugh at the excessive credulity of the Calabrians, to whose wild superstitions I was by that time no stranger. "Old gossips," he continued, putting some silver into their attenuated hands, to quicken their apprehension; "for what reason does this terrible feudatory keep garrison so closely? Nay, speak one at a time, but as quickly as you please; our time is short."

"You must have come from a distant country, illustrissimi signori, that you have not heard of the poor Cavalierease

Belcastro," said one of the old women, taking her jar from her head, on which she had poised it, and replacing it on the margin of the well, to point the periods with her fingers while speaking. "There is not a child on this side of La Sylva, but knows her story. Some people say her husband stole her from a convent; others, that she left a noble signor whom she loved better, and married the Cavaliere Belcastro for the sake of his rank."

"His rank!" reiterated Marco contemptuously, his brows contracting; "Yet, I may mistake—proceed."

"After marriage came repentance, and the Signor Belcastro was tormented by jealousy, believing that a woman who was false to another could never be very true to himself. And truly he had proof of her light carriage with a handsome young captain, who was carried away to the Val di Demona, by those imps who are always at the signor's elbow, awaiting his commands. Since then he has kept the poor lady locked up in a dreary chamber of the villa, from which he brings her forth but once a week, to go to mass on horseback; and she is so strictly watched, that, notwithstanding three attempts made by the brave capobandito, Scarolla, she yet remains a captive."

"Watched by a spirit, who will never leave her till the cavalier dies and Satan claims his own," added the other woman.

"Malediction on such husbands!" exclaimed the first gossip; "if my Maso treated me so, I would put a dose of aquetta in his soup—I would! He was jealous once; but we were young then, and I soon soothed him."

"How the terror of this man's name has besotted these poor simpletons," said Marco, as we rode through the wood along a narrow path they had pointed out. "He is said to be a dark and curious being; and, leaving out the sorcery, their relation is almost word for word what I have heard at Naples and Palermo. I would stake a thousand ducats to a bajocco, we shall have an unseemly brawl with this melancholy Castellano, unless his character is much exaggerated."

"Indeed! For my own part, I would willingly stake a cool hundred, if I could serve the poor lady."

"Of the signora, the less we say perhaps the better,—though I feel some curiosity to know her maiden name and family, and a great deal to see the inside of this place, to which we are venturing, like two rash knights, after the solemn warnings of yonder Cumæan sibyls. I perceive them

still watching our route, as if it was beset with as many perils as any in the 'Hundred ancient Tales.'"

"By Jove, sir, they are not much mistaken!" I exclaimed, as a musket flashed from a loop-hole in the outer wall, and the shot whistled over my shoulder.

"May I perish if this shall pass unrevenged!" exclaimed the cavalier. "Basta! let us forward, and at full gallop!"

In a minute we were close under the walls, the outer windows of which were all barred and far from the ground. An iron gate closed the portal, or archway; and beyond it we saw ten or twelve sinister-looking ruffians, clad in a sort of livery, and armed with black cross-belts, musketoons, and bayonets.

"Rascals!" exclaimed my companion, "are ye Italians, true Catholics, and yet ignorant that it is sacrilege to molest one of the Sangiovanni? In the days of the Holy Office, this must have been settled otherwise, even in Calabria. But open the barrier and give us instant admission, or it may fare the worse with your lord, to whom we must speak, and without delay."

The porter, an old Albanian Greek, who trembled between fear of disobeying his master's orders and offending a knight of Malta—an order lately so formidable—slowly undid the bolts and chains, imploring, in his curious dialect, that we would soften the wrath of the Cavalier Galdino, and save his shoulders from the scurlada. Until the French invasion, the resident feudatories of Calabria, Apulia, &c., maintained the feudal system with all its iron tyranny; but since the frightful war of extermination, waged in these provinces by General Manhes, and the peace of 1815, it does not exist in any of the Italian states, except, I believe the island of Sardinia. Between the tyranny and oppression of the barons and their armed followers—with whom, on various pretexts, they garrisoned their castles and villas—the dues or tithes of the numerous priesthood, and the outrages of the brigands, the situation of the peaceful portion of the mountaineers was not very enviable.

"Which of ye dared to fire upon us? and by whose order?" asked Castelfermo, laying his hand on his sword, and surveying the culprits with a stern eye. There was no reply. "Cowards! do you hear me?"

"Cavaliero Marco," said one fellow, coming forward hat in hand, after a long pause, "I trust we know our creed better than to molest any man who wears upon his breast the cross

of Malta. But, indeed, it was no other than excellenza himself who fired the shot; and let him answer for it."

"The villain!" I exclaimed, leaping from my horse.

"Dio mi guardi! the deed was none of ours, Signor Marco."

"Who are you, that seem so well acquainted with my name?"

"A poor rogue of Amendolia, signor; by name, Baptistello Varro. I cannot presume to think you can recollect me, though I had the honour to serve with you, under your uncle the Cardinal Ruffo, while his eminence was yet a true man to Italy and the Holy Faith. You remember the siege of Altamura, on the plains of Apulia; you saved my life there. Ah! what a leaguer that was! His eminence built altars where other men would have had batteries, and besprinkled our cannon so plentifully with holy water that they often hung fire. I owe you a life, signor; and an Italian never forgets either a friend or a foe."

"Well, Master Baptistello, although I have no remembrance of those things, I doubt not you are an honest fellow; but the sooner you change leaders the better. Quit this inhospitable den to-morrow, and join the corps of the Free Calabri at Crotona. But, meanwhile, lead us to this ungracious lord of yours. The shot he fired shall cost him dear, or I am not—lead on, Basta!" and, with his usual exclamation, he cut short what he meant to have said.

On being ushered up a spacious staircase of white marble, the stained glass windows of which were faintly lighted by the lingering flush of the departed sun, we found ourselves in an ancient hall, decorated in a quaint style of architecture, neither Norman nor Saracenic, but a mixture of both, and a relic, perhaps, of the days of those invaders. Lighted by four large windows, which overlooked the vale and forest, now dimly illumined by the rising moon, its roof was arched with stone, profusely carved, and supported by twelve antique figures, or caryatides, which supplied the place of pillars; they were sculptured out of the sonorous marble of Campanni, which, when struck, is said to resound like a bell; and their time-worn, mutilated forms, glimmered like pale spectres amid the gloom of evening and the shadows of the darkening hall. By the light of the stars and the moon's wan crescent, we could discern sylvan trophies, sombre paintings, from which grim faces of old Italian knights and older saints looked forth, and numerous weapons of various dates, which adorned the lofty walls

"'Tis long since I stood in such a noble old hall as this," said Marco, casting himself languidly into a gilt fauteuil. "General Regnier, applying the forcible argument of gunpowder, has done more, perhaps, than the march of civilization, towards destroying the feudal system; and the ancient strongholds and palazzi of our noblesse are now somewhat scarce, even in the lower province. We must be on our guard with this signor of Belcastro," he added, in a whisper. "I have often heard of him at Palermo, as being a sullen, subtle, and ferocious man,—a ruined gamester and half desperado—cunning as a lynx, and treacherous as Cesare Borgia. Heaven help the unhappy woman whom fate has tied to him! But, ha! what have we here?" he exclaimed aloud, snatching from a marble slab the long envelope of some official communication which just then caught his eye; "See you this, Signor Claude? Our villian host has been in correspondence with the enemy."

It was addressed to the "Cavaliere Galdino di Belcastro," and endorsed in the corner, "*Regnier, Général de Division.*"

"Now, I would give a thousand ducats to know what this contained," said my companion, as he thrust it into his long glove. "'Tis sealed with the crest of the iron crown, and—but, Basta! here he comes."

As he spoke, there entered the hall a tall man, of powerful frame and most forbidding aspect, attired in the full dress of the old school; his hair powdered and tied with a white riband, his shirt ruffled at the wrists and bosom, a wide skirted coat, and black satin knee breeches, with buckles. The courtly air which this costume usually imparts to the wearer, rather heightened than diminished the repulsive manner of this tyrannical feudatory.

"Lights here! Olà, Baptistello! a light, you loitering whelp," he cried, with the voice of one in no pleasant mood. In less than a minute, servants had lighted the wax candles of three gigantic girandoles, and we had a better view of our host. He was past the meridian of life, and his countenance, which I have already characterized as forbidding, was rendered yet more so by a hideous cicatrix, as from the gash of a sword-cut, which grew purple and black alternately. He bowed to us with frigid hauteur, and then surveyed with a peculiar glance, the tall and noble figure of Castelfermo. The latter changed colour on beholding the scar, but said, with a stern aspect, after a pause,—

"How now, Signor Galdino! do you take me for a lynx, a torpedo, the devil, or what, that you look on me thus?"

"For none of these," he answered, coldly; "but say, who are ye, signori, that force yourselves upon my privacy uninvited?"

"I am an officer of his Britannic majesty's service—*Luogoteniente di Fanteria nel servizio Britannica*—and a bearer of despatches." The cavaliere bowed.

"And I the cavaliere di Castelermo, knight commander of Malta, and an officer of the Free Calabri; as such, I demand your reasons for firing upon us like some base brigand, thus committing both treason and sacrilege."

"By the ancient customs of Calabria, common to the land since the days of Count Roger the First, I may defend my residence against the intrusion of all men. As for the treason, *cospetto!* I care little whether Buonaparte or Ferdinand is our ruler; and as for the sacrilege, I can answer for that where, when, and how you will!" His fingers played convulsively with a little stiletto, which hung half concealed beneath the lapelle of his embroidered vest.

"Rest assured, Signor Galdino, that I am not slow in literally translating the hint; but recollect that, as a cavaliere of birth and honour, I would scorn to put my life in the scale with a traitor's!"

"How?" exclaimed Belcastro, starting forward with rage.

Castelermo held before his eyes the paper he had picked up, and our host changed colour beneath the cold, sarcastic smile of the knight. He started, as if to summon his people, but paused—a sudden thought seemed to occur to him; he gulped down his fury, his brows became smooth, and a ghastly smile curled his sinister lip.

"Eh, *via signori!* you are now under my roof; the ways are dangerous hereabout; you cannot proceed; and I must not forget that hospitality which courtesy renders imperative. Let us say no more of that unlucky wall-piece, which, in a moment of irritation, I discharged. My residence is seldom favoured by peaceful visitors. But are any more of King Ferdinand's people—troops, I mean—likely to pass this way soon?"

"A brigade of British are entering the valley, and will probably arrive here after midnight." Our host looked displeased, and turned to one of the windows, while I glanced inquiringly at Castelermo, who whispered—

"I deemed it politic to say so, for he has some dark end in view. I did not like the sudden and sinister smile which replaced the gloom of his sullen visage. You observed it? By

St. John of Malta! were our cattle not tired with these rugged mountain-roads, I would rather have passed the night in my saddle than under his roof. A few miles further would have brought us to the town of Belcastro; but there is no help for it now."

My companion was not deceived. Animated by a fear that we had discovered his correspondence with the French leader, and by a wish to possess himself of my despatches to transmit them to the same personage; eager, also, to gratify the deep-rooted hatred he bore to Casteltermo, he secretly determined to murder us both, and in cold blood. The bullet or poniard had been his first resolve; but dreading discovery, and the arrival of the supposed brigade, poison became his next resource. But I am anticipating. The change in his manner was too abrupt and barefaced to pass without exciting our suspicions.

CHAPTER XXI.

SEQUEL TO THE STORY OF CASTELTERMO.

WHILE Signor Belcastro scanned the star-lighted valley, to trace the march of those troops whom he had no wish to see, servants laid a hasty supper of various cold meats, boiled maccheroni, and fruit, all of which were very acceptable to the cavaliers and myself; we were well appetized by our ride over the mountains, exposed to a keen tramontana, or north wind, which had been blowing for the last two hours.

"Be seated, gentlemen!" said our host, as he took the head of the table. "Will you not lay aside your swords?"

"We have been so much accustomed to them of late, that mine is no encumbrance."

"Nor mine," said Marco, bestowing on me a glance so peculiar, that I refrained from unclasping my belt. There was so much blunt distrust in this, that the face of Belcastro flushed.

"Shall we not have the pleasure of seeing the signora at supper?" said Marco, as he spread his table napkin, and attacked a plate of cold roasted meat, affecting to be unconscious that he stung Belcastro to the quick by the question.

"I regret that she is indisposed," he replied, regarding

the cavalier with furtive glances, his eyes burning like red sparks beneath his shaggy brows; "seriously so; but, indeed, she never appears before visitors."

"So I have heard at Palermo," said Marco, drily, and in the same peculiar tone, while the face of Belcastro grew purple and the gash black,—though he continued his supper with apparent composure. "'Tis said, signor," continued his tormentor, "that being jealous of her surpassing beauty, you keep her a little too close,—after the old Italian fashion. I have heard the captive lady of Belcastro spoken of more than once at the Sicilian court; and truly, but that the days of chivalry are gone by, our grand master would have sent a squadron of his best knights to summon your stronghold—"

"Cavaliere Marco!" said our host, sternly, "those persons at Palermo, or elsewhere, who meddle with my affairs, will act a wiser part in attending to their own. Massena is now hovering on the frontiers of Upper Calabria with a force that must sweep the British from Italy—ay, and from Sicily, too! Where, then, will be the lazzaroni court? Signor, cease your jesting. Cospetto! this is not a time for the courtiers of Ferdinand to create enemies."

There was something in all this beyond my comprehension. I supped rather uncomfortably,—some mischief was brewing. Why, I knew not; but the half-moehalant, half-contemptuous manner of Casteltermo, and the sullen air of Belcastro, were not calculated to make me feel perfectly "at home." The conversation that passed was purely political, and conducted in a very unpleasant style of sarcasm and retort. Our host seemed no friend to the Bourbon cause, and freely abused the character of Ferdinand.

"But glory to Carolina!" he added, "she is worth a legion of such men as her husband; and but for her influence alone, the spirit of resistance (you term it honour and freedom) had long since been scared from Naples by the eagles of Napoleon!"

"'Tis a sad truth," said Casteltermo, with a sigh. "Oh, that the pure flame of patriotism which burns in my own breast could be kindled in every Italian heart!—that my countrymen, instead of their silly desire for separate dukedoms and independent commonwealths, would cherish a spirit of love and union, and exalt the standard of their country to that place which it once held. Then the Ausonians would become once more a people, like their Latin fathers: the first

on earth. Think of the richness of our soil, which yields in abundance all that man can desire; the magnificence of our cities, which have ever been famous for the great men they have produced—historians, politicians, poets, painters, musicians, and sculptors. 'Tis the land to which all Europe owes its religion, its civilization, and its laws! But, alas! its spirit is dead, or Italy would become once more a nation, and a great one: not a land of shreds and patches—of principalities, republics, and seignories, pining and withering amid dissensions and jealousies at home, and wars and woes abroad. But Italia! Italia, as she was once—a glorious and united nation—one kingdom from the mountains of Savoy to the Capo del Armi—where would be her equal?"

"Chimera, all!" replied Belcastro, coolly draining a glass of wine; while Marco, whose eyes sparkled, and whose cheek flushed scarlet during this outburst, continued with a tone of sadness—

"I know it. Never will her people or her wicked rulers be aware of this,—as Austria is, and other nations are, whose interest it is to keep Italy feeble, partitioned, and divided."

"Europe must bow to France," said Belcastro, who was a confirmed Buonapartist. "Look around us! Ferdinand styles himself king of Naples and of Sicily; whether he is likely to keep that title long, even though protected by the fleets and armies of Britain, is very problematical. You fight for his crown here among the wilds of Calabria, while he spends his days ingloriously at Palermo; and, instead of leading on his Italians to battle, to gain a kingdom or a grave, he hunts in the woods of Sicily, clad in a grey doublet, greasy cap, and worsted hose, like some ignoble peasant, rather than the son of Charles of Parma and Placentia. In truth, he is the most cowardly, ignorant, and indolent sloth on this side of the Alps. His feeble cause would expire altogether, but for the indomitable spirit of Carolina of Austria, who is the very reverse of such a husband: her presence at the council-table, when fired with ardour and indignation against the destroyers of her sister Marie Antoinette, is alone sufficient to keep alive the sinking patriotism of our nobles."

"Cavalier Galdino," said Marco, angrily, "there is much truth in what you have said; yet remember, that even *truth* may be treason; and that, if you always express yourself so freely, there are those not far off who will not permit you to pass without molestation. You are aware how merciless our

countrymen are to all favourers of Napoleon. Scarolla is among these mountains with his people——”

“Talk not to me of Scarolla!” cried Belcastro, furiously—“a base-born brigand, to whom this very Carolina sends arms and money; and, perhaps, she has disgraced the order of St. Constantine by hanging it on his villanous neck, as on that of Francatripa and Mammone, the blood-quaffer. A thousand devils! tell me not of Scarolla—but, fido! never mind politics. Here, Baptistello! clear the table, and bring more wine. What shall it be? Malvasia or Champagne? I have some excellent Muscatelle—its flavour is matchless. Shall it be placed before you?”

“Thank you, with pleasure,” said I, bowing, glad to find that our irritable host was discovering a little more of the gentleman in his manner.

“I never drink Muscatelle,” said Castelermo. This I knew to be false: it was his favourite wine. “But, Signor Belcastro, I——”

“Have no objection to try yours, you would say? Right, Varro—hand down the old silver jars from the left side of the cabinet there,—the lower shelf,” he added, throwing a ring with keys towards the servant.

The latter opened the antique piece of furniture, which was composed of ebony, ivory, and silver,—the pillars, carving, and figures, being all equally elaborate and beautiful. He brought forth from its dark recesses two flasks, or silver vases, of ample dimensions. Each had a small mouth rising from a tall and taper neck; one was closed by a red, the other by a green crystal stopper. Their workmanship was exquisite, but I doubted if the contents were so. Grapes, bacchanals, and nymphs appeared in rich embossage, and a shield on each side bore a coat of arms deeply engraved. Belcastro’s dark eyes flashed, but I thought it was with pride, as he pushed the massive flasks towards us, saying—

“These were made by Cellini, the famous Florentine, for Pope Clement VII.; and when Rome was sacked by the Constable de Bourbon, an ancestor of mine, who served with his vassals under the papal banner, picked them up in the confusion.”

Baptistello placed the vases officiously before Castelermo, whispering to us hastily, but audibly, the ill-omened words—

“*La belladonna!*”

Marco’s cheek flushed, and I started, on observing that Varro’s usually swart visage was pale as death.

“The vases are, indeed, superb,” said my companion,

turning them round with an air of unconcern, which I had some trouble in imitating, feeling certain that a catastrophe was at hand. "Beautiful, truly, and I doubt not that Clement, of holy memory, prized them highly, and regretted their loss in an equal degree."

"I have goblets to match, said to be made from part of the treasure stolen, by the same cunning sculptor from the castle of St. Angelo. Bring them forth, Baptistello."

The servant, after searching for a time in the depths of the cabinet, declared that the goblets were not there.

"Not there, said you? Satan! they have been stolen; and, if so, your bare back shall feel a stripe of the scurlada for every bajoccho they were worth!" cried Belcastro, passionately, as he started up and flung open the doors of the cabinet.

"Admirable!" muttered Castelfermo, changing the crystal stoppers, and receiving a keen glance from Varro, the moment our host's back was turned. "Be still," he added, grasping my arm, energetically, "be patient—our lives are hanging by a hair."

"Saved—buono—O, Gran Dio!" added Varro.

"You must be either blind or drunk, Varro, or have the eyes of a mole, for here are the cups," said the cavaliere, placing three silver-chased tankards on the table. "You may retire now—we need you no more," and our friend retired, but only to the hall-door.

"Shall I fill for you, signori," continued Belcastro, taking out the stoppers and filling our cups from one of the flasks; then, as if inadvertently, he filled his own from the *other*, and drank it off. The commander of Malta crossed himself; his brow was black as night, but his emotion was unnoticed; he took up his cup, and, bowing to the host, drained the bright Muscatelle fearlessly. I had no pretence for delay, and to have lingered would have seemed cowardice to Castelfermo. It was a horrid dilemma. My brain reeled, my pulses beat thick and fast, my heart sank, and my whole soul was troubled with sensations such as I had never before experienced—and certainly never have since.

It was a frightful moment of doubt and agony. But I drank off the wine (which, for aught that I knew, was charged with a deadly drug), resolving to run the cavaliere Galdino through the body, the instant I felt the least symptom of illness from it.

"Well, signori, I hope you like my favourite wine," said he, as we set down our cups; a dark smile gathering on his

sombre features. But Baptistello, too, was smiling, and I gathered comfort from that. The liquor tasted like ordinary Muscatelle, a little sweeter, perhaps, in flavour. We had soon no doubt, from the grave, grim, and altered aspect of the cavaliere, that he had filled his own goblet with the poisoned wine intended for our destruction (as it had, perhaps, already been for others), and drugged with an infusion of *Solanum*, or the deadly night-shade, called Belladonna by the Italians, because ladies make a cosmetic of the juice. I felt that our safety was entirely owing to Castelermo's presence of mind in changing the stoppers, and became deeply grateful to Varro for his tact and friendly warning.

An awkward pause ensued as we set down our cups. It was a grave moment for us all; we felt in our hearts that a terrible crisis was past. But for my friend's peculiar tact and stern example, I would have flung the goblet at Galdino's head on his invitation to drink, and by refusing to taste the Muscatelle have discovered the dark suspicions we entertained. However, we were safe, while this modern Borgia had fallen into his own snare.

"Come, signori, why pause you thus? You seem not to have relished the wine," said our entertainer, again filling his silver cup from the fatal vase, and draining it to the dregs. "Buono! of all our Italian wines, I prefer the Muscatelle; but this, of course, I produce only on certain occasions, and to certain friends," he added, with a hideous laugh, which made the dark corners of the hall echo hollowly. My heart chilled with abhorrence of the man, and apprehension of what was to ensue.

"Croce di Malta!" muttered Marco, surveying him with a glance of stern curiosity; "his potion operates already."

"His death rests with himself—the guilt, I mean: the deed was his own doing," said I, in the same low tone.

Belcastro, lolling back in his chair, laughed and hallooed in a manner so unusual, that a number of his household crowded about the hall door, and were seen peering fearfully upon our dismal carousal. He showed all the symptoms of sudden intoxication; but the disease that was then spreading through every vein took a new and unexpected turn. Belladonna often produces idiocy or folly, and Belcastro became quite insane. The white froth of madness hung from his livid lips and black mustachios, and his eyes, while sparkling with all the fury of a tiger's, were glazing fast with the ghastly glare of death. He laughed boisterously, but such laughter! Regarding him more as a wild beast than a man.

I thought only of what my fate *might* have been, and loosened my sabre in its sheath, ready to draw it the instant his fit took a dangerous turn. Castelermo clenched the hilt of his poniard, and the assembled servants shrank behind our chairs for protection.

"Ha, ha! ho, ho! the wine!—'tis like the flames of hell! O Apostoli! the signora of Belcastro—look well about ye, ye vagabonds! She would have been a capitanesa, if she could; but I slashed the gay uniform of her beardless capitano! The traitress, Piozzi! poisoned, per Baccho!" and his head settled down on his breast. The white saliva ran from his mouth over his chin and white ruffled shirt, while his eyes, which were fixed on the face of the cavaliere Marco, flashed like those of a fiend, rather than a mortal man. From their position, and the slanting manner in which the light fell on them, they seemed absolutely to shoot forth a blue glare from beneath his beetling brows. His visage was pale as death; all, save the scar, which was still of a dark purple hue.

"Villain!" cried he, pointing to it, and starting up in a new frenzy, "have you forgotten that your poniard disfigured me thus? Have you forgotten that night in the Strada di Toledo, at Naples?"

Marco laughed sternly, and the insane man, quailing before his firm glance, again sank down in his seat; for a time he became silent and still.

"Come hither, Baptistello, and you, signor Claude," said Castelermo, "aid me to disarm him, or he may turn on us, and with some concealed weapon be the death of us all."

We advanced simultaneously towards him; but with a yell so loud and shrill, that (as Varro afterwards protested), it brought forth an echo from each of the twelve figures of Campanini marble, he leaped from his chair, and rushed towards the windows, through which the bright moonlight streamed, as if vying with the illuminated girandoles of the hall. Impelled by madness, or some strange terror, he dashed headlong through the casement, sending the fragments flying in every direction, and sprang out upon the massive stone balcony. There he tossed his arms wildly, while his domestics, overcome with terror, held aloft their crucifixes, and muttered Aves.

"Dog as he is, let us save him, in the name of mercy! Meet him at the other end of the balcony, and stand well on your guard," exclaimed Castelermo, as we stepped out upon the platform. The cavaliere Galdino was thus placed between us; but the moment he found us advancing deliberately upon

him, he placed both hands on the cope of the stone balustrade, and, uttering a shout of triumph, vaulted over and fell headlong through the space below. Far beneath us we heard a slight brushing on the furzy rocks, a falling of dislodged stones, and all was still.

Half sick and giddy, I clung to the balcony, and looked over on the dark pine forest and winding valley below the tower, from which a plumb-line might have been dropped to the depth of two hundred feet, without meeting with an obstacle. He must have been dead before he reached the bottom.

"Devil as he was, and though he has cast a dark shadow on the brightest path that ever opened to me through life, I would rather that he had died at Cassano, with his face to the enemy, than thus miserably and ignobly," said Castelfermo. "Basta! in making his elegy, I must not forget to thank St. John for our narrow escape, and the author of some ancient story for that blessed hint about changing those coloured stoppers. Ah! the cunning villain. My blood boils while I think of his stern treachery. Approach, Baptistello Varro; you shall have a score of bright ducats for this good service to-night," he added, slapping the servant familiarly on the shoulder.

"May my fingers be blistered if I touch them!" said Varro. "Signor, I have only requited the good service you did me on the plains of Apulia, when the Frenchman's plaguy bayonet was at my throat. To any other man than yourself, illustrissimo, I might have behaved like a true sbirro, and allowed him to drink a skinful of la belladonna, if such was the pleasure of his excellency. 'Tis the third time I have seen these rascally jars produced."

"Then you are the greater rogue, Varro; but as you are deprived of one master, we must find you another. Seek the cavaliere del Castagno at Crotona, who in my name will enrol you in the free corps, where you will do more good service to your country, by serving under their colours, than by wearing the livery of these dissipated and tyrannical feudatories, who are a curse to the land they rule."

"Would it please you to see the cavalieressa?" asked Baptistello, "she will be a free woman now, since this last prank of her husband's, and I know a certain capitano who will throw up his cap when he hears of it. A sad life she has endured with him, signor, mewed up in this desolate place, where never a soul was to be seen, save a lonely shepherd on the distant mountains, or a stray peasant cutting wood in the

valley below. *Via!* I will quit it this hour, and rather fight under Scarolla than again don the livery and aiguillette of a *sbirro*."

"Silence, Varro," said Marco; "silence, and lead on to the apartment of the lady. If it should be so; she whom I loved so much! *Basta!* I have faced Frenchmen, Turks, and Algerines: but this meeting—forward! It is fitter that she should learn her misfortune, or deliverance (term it which you may) from the mouth of a gentleman, than from a rabble of serving-men."

We followed Baptistello across the court or quadrangle, and ascending a flight of narrow steps lighted by flickering lamps, arrived at a corridor, where the voices of females and sounds of lamentation became audible.

"This leads to the apartments of the signora," said our guide.

"It seems more like the lighthouse of Messina," I observed, "or the stair to a prison."

"And the poor lady has found it a prison dreary enough," continued the garrulous Italian. "Here she has dwelt for three long years, and seen but seldom the face of her husband. *Cattivo!* often I have heard her lamenting in the dreary nights, when I kept watch in the gallery; for this is a tower of the villa, and its window commands a view as far as to the *Tacina*. Then I wished that I was a noble cavalier instead of a poor serving-man, that I might free her from such thralldom. You must know, Signor Marco," and here his voice sank into a very confidential whisper, "the gay captain who used to serenade the cavalieressa at Venice, did not die when the hired bravo stabbed him. The wound was inflicted by a glass poniard, and the blade was broken in the wound; it was long of being extracted, and longer of being healed; but he recovered, and is now at Catanzaro; and, having bribed Scarolla, he has made more than one attempt to carry off his mistress, but, by *Excellenza's* order, we always kept such close watch —"

"*Basta, forward!*" exclaimed Marco, impatiently. "Do you take us for brothers of the shoulder-knot, that we are to stand here listening to your household scandal? I must see your lady without delay."

"To judge by what we hear, her women have been beforehand with you, signor," replied Varro, again taking the lead; and as a proof how little the cavalier's treatment of his wife caused her to be respected by his dependants, the *sbirro*

threw open her chamber-door, and without knock or warning ushered us unceremoniously in.

The apartment was elegant; through parted hangings of blue silk and gold, festooned between columns of white marble rising from vases of green jasper, was revealed an inner chamber, where stood a couch, formed like a large gilded shell: above it drooped drapery of white satin, edged with the richest lace. Books, music, mandolins, were scattered about, together with work-baskets, flowers, and various gewgaws; everything that taste, wealth, or luxury could wish were there—save happiness. Sadly pale were the careworn, but beautiful features of the lady, and strongly they contrasted with the plump red cheek of her robust Calabrian waiting-woman, who stuck close to her skirts on our entrance.

She started, shook back the heavy ringlets from her snowy brow, and gazed upon us with dark but brilliant eyes, which expressed more astonishment than grief.

"Despina Vignola," exclaimed Castelermo, as he started back a pace, and regarded her with a glance rather of deep sorrow than wonder, "Ah, Despina! how little could I once have dreamed we should have met here, and greeted each other thus!"

She gazed alternately at the dark but handsome features of the cavaliere, and the broad black velvet cross on the breast of his scarlet uniform; and her glance of wonder gradually changed to one of confusion, recognition, and anger; she covered her blushing features with her pale hand, but for an instant only, and then looking up with an air of hauteur, said—

"This meeting is quite as unexpected to me as it may be to you, Signori Cavalieri. How is it that you have this night slain my dear husband, the Signor Galdino, and within his own house of Belcastro?"

"A cool question!" said Marco, bitterly, gnawing his glove, while his proud spirit was roused by her cold nonchalance; "admirably so! and to be asked by a notary's niece, of a cavaliere of the house of Ruffo Sciglio——"

"Ruffo, the traitor!" said she, scornfully; "but you reply not to my question."

"I will ask but another,—why the devil your amiable sposo slew himself? Basta! he fell into that deadly snare which his deliberate villany and groundless hate prepared for better men. But let me be gentle; perhaps at this moment he is making answer for his misdeeds before that dread

tribunal where all men must one day stand—the prince and the peasant, the highborn lord and the homeless lazarone. (Here Marco signed the cross, and all bowed their heads, save myself.) Peace be with his ashes! I shall forget that in the days of my joyous youth he robbed me of my poor patrimony, and deprived me of that which was dearer to me than all the world beside—the love of thee, Despina; forcing me to abandon my country, and serve in the wars of the Maltese knights as a humble musketeer of the galleys. A knight of St. John should bear no enmity to the dead, and wars not with Christian men, unless another's sword is drawn upon him, after which, I trust he will stand buffets and blows like a true cavalier of the rock."

"Bravissimo!" said the lady, affecting to smile scornfully through the tears which glittered in her fine eyes, "a woman's apartment is an excellent place to swagger and bluster in. You have all the manners of a Venetian bravo, signor."

"Those of a Venetian captain might be more pleasing," retorted the excited cavalier. "But I will quit your roof, signora, and travel to Belcastro; though this night Charybdis yawned in my path. Basta! the wearer of such a badge as this cross is scarcely safe in the house of a damsel so famous for her gallantries."

"By the blessed Madonna! Belcastro you shall never see," exclaimed Despina, aroused to passion by his taunts. "Ola, Baptistello! where is the Teniente Guesippe and his sbirri? Here, Signor Guesippe di Gondezani! Dio! I shall burst with fury!"

In a few minutes the teniente, with twelve armed servants at his back, entered the apartment, and surrounded us with levelled musketoons and fixed bayonets.

"If this adventure ends in blows, I at least shall have one man's life in exchange for my own," said I, drawing my sabre. Castelfermo folded his arms beneath the dark military cloak which bore the red cross of his order on the left shoulder, and surveyed the lady and her unscrupulous rabble with a frown of contempt.

"Molest us, if you dare!" said he. "Bear in remembrance, that though the holy office has passed away, he who raises his hand against a Maltese knight commits sacrilege. Insult me, and think how it will be avenged! There are no less than fifty cavaliers of my old commandery scattered through this very province, and in two days they would hurl this

mansion into the valley below. Not less will be the vengeance of the British general, if this officer, my friend, is maltreated by those wretches and malefactors who wear your husband's livery. Back, ye scoundrels!" he suddenly exclaimed, and drew his sword; "and you, Baptistello, lead our horses to the gate. Santa notte, la Signora Cavalieressa! we shall not forget our entertainment in this diabolical lazaretto. And good night to you, Signor Gaesippe. and your myrmidons," continued Marco, with fierce irony. "Basta! the malaria of the valley, and the chance of being riddled by the rifles of Scarolla, are preferable to remaining here, where poison and cold lead seem your best welcome to visitors. And so, once more, a most holy night to all this noble company."

We descended to the piazza, where, mounting our half-refreshed horses, we again set forth on our journey; wishing the Villa Belcastro and all its inmates in a hotter place than Italy.

"Signor Marco, I shall be particularly careful how I thrust myself uninvited upon a Calabrian mansion in future," said I, yawning as we descended the hills.

"You have seen Despina, and this night have had the *sequel* to my story. How little I expected it, when yesterday I whiled away an hour during our ride by a relation of my adventures. I long suspected that Belcastro was my rival, but never had proof of the fact until to-night."

I addressed him once or twice, but he heard me not, and continued to ride on with his head bent forward, and his bridle-hand resting listlessly on the pommel of the saddle. He was, no doubt, deeply immersed in sad thoughts and recollections, which this unexpected interview with the woman he once loved so tenderly had recalled from oblivion.

CHAPTER XXII.

ITALIAN INTRIGUES IN COUNTRY QUARTERS.

ON arriving at the base of those lofty rocks which were crowned by the Villa Belcastro, a sound like the baying and growling of dogs caused Marco's horse to snort, and mine to plunge and curvet furiously. On advancing a little further, we discovered, by the light of the moon, a sight which filled us with disgust. Two enormous lynxes had been contending for the shattered corse of the Cavaliere Galdino, which had already suffered considerable mutilation under their fangs. They retired on our approach, but one dragged the remains nearly a hundred yards, nor dropped them until we fired our pistols and wounded it, when they both fled over the mountains, howling, one with agony, and the other with fear. We had considerable trouble in getting our horses past the body, which lay fairly in the centre of our narrow path; and, notwithstanding that Cartouche was a trained military charger, he plunged, reared, and perspired with rage and fear, until, by dint of spur, I forced him right over the ghastly remains of our late entertainer.

Soon after, the moon went down, the sky changed from deep blue to dusky grey, and gloomy clouds hurried in flitting masses across it; at times a solitary star shot forth, and then was lost. The tinkling rivulet, winding through the valley, and the silver haze which floated from it through pine and orange groves, faded away, and we could no longer see the track before us. Casteltermo now proposed that we should bivouac for the night in the first eligible place, that our nags might have better bottom for continuing our journey by daybreak.

After a brief reconnoissance, we chose a sheltered spot, where there was a little fountain; the water bubbled away from a fissure in one of those masses of grey sandstone so common in Calabria, and of which the rocks of the Apennines are chiefly composed. We picqueted our horses within a circle of little maple trees, which formed a pleasant border round the rocky alcove, and rolling our cloaks about us, were in five minutes alike oblivious of the terrors of wolves, banditti, and the malaria.

When I awoke, the morning sun was rising like a globe of fire above the mountains, and pouring between their craggy

summits a flood of yellow lustre into the misty valley where we lay. Afar off, the villa of Belcastro, its casements gleaming in the dancing sunbeams like plates of polished gold, towered on the cliff that rose above the waving woodlands, bathed in purple and white. A solitary fig-tree threw its shadow across the fountain, the rude bason of which had been built by the shepherds with the richly-sculptured fragments of some ancient building,—a relic, perhaps, of the days of *Magna Græcia*. On the moss-grown pieces were initials and inscriptions, which I had neither time nor lore to decipher, and close by me lay, half sunk in the flowery turf, a mossy Corinthian capital, with a winged horse, exquisitely carved, springing from the acanthus leaves at each corner, and supporting on its outspread pinions the acute angles of the abacus. A glittering snake was twining round it; and the contiguity of such a reptile recalling the adventure with the gypsies, I sprung up, shook my ample cloak, and prepared for the saddle again.

A gallop in the pure air of a breezy morning is delightful exercise; it refreshes the body and enlivens the spirits, bracing the frame and lightening the heart. The place where we had reposed was swampy, and a pestilential vapour hovered about it, oppressing us with an inclination to doze, which we had some trouble in combating; but our gallop along the sunny mountain-side soon shook off the drowsiness which weighed down our eyelids, and the numbness that stiffened our limbs. The sensation I mean, must have been experienced by all who have bivouacked by night in low marshy places in a warm atmosphere.

We passed the little town of Belcastro, the streets of which, according to ancient use and wont, were so encumbered with herds of wild pigs, the common stock of the inhabitants, that we could scarcely get our startled horses through, and were every moment in danger of being thrown by the snorting porkers running between their legs. We had a hasty repast at a miserable albergo, but it was the best in the place, and, as the host averred, the identical house in which *Thomas Aquinas* was born.

The roads were so winding and intricate, that as yet we were only twenty miles distant from *Crotona*, and we pushed rapidly forward, resolving to make up for the previous day's delay.

Castelermo, upon whom the adventures of the past night had made a gloomy impression, rode beside me for many miles in silence. His mind was, doubtless, reverting to a thousand

long-forgotten dreams and cherished thoughts, which his interview with the fickle Despina, and the sound of her voice, had summoned before him; while I, on the contrary, felt light-hearted as the distance diminished between us and the villa D'Alfieri, which it was my intention to visit on our way to head-quarters. I thought more of Bianca's bright eyes and glossy ringlets, than the oblong despatches, returns of killed, wounded, prisoners, and missing, lists of captured cannon, stores, &c. &c., with which Macleod had stuffed my sabretache, for the perusal of Sir John Stuart.

After a time, the wonted serenity of the cavalier returned, and as the country into which we penetrated became more mountainous and romantic, he related to me many a wild legend and tradition of blood and sorcery—of Gothic chiefs, Norman knights, and Saracen emirs, and many a sad story of Italian love, all of which have long since passed away from my remembrance. Every rood of ground was rich in memories of the past, and covered with the moss-grown relics of bygone nations and ages.

A ride of twelve miles or so brought us to Catanzaro, in the principality of Squillaci, one of the finest towns in Calabria Ultra, situated about two miles from the Adriatic. Catanzaro then bore many traces of that terrible earthquake which, in 1783, devastated those provinces and the Isle of Sicily, and it has been almost wholly destroyed by a similar visitation in 1832. Its ladies were esteemed the most beautiful in southern Italy, but I had little opportunity of judging for myself; we had the pleasure of seeing only one handsome girl, who, during the hour or two we halted, displayed a formidable sample of the worst traits in the Calabrian character. A small party of Italian troops, sent over from Palermo, were quartered in the town. Their uniform was white, with scarlet facings and epaulettes, black cross-belts, and heavy bear-skin caps; altogether, they were very soldier-like fellows, and their commanding officer, a gay young Neapolitan, whom we met at the table d'hôte, was not less so. As we had been acquainted at Palermo, in the course of ten minutes we became intimate as old friends, and Captain Valerio Piozzi, of Caroline's Italian Guard, soon made us aware that he was the most reckless and dissipated cavalier in Ferdinand's service, and that he thought it no small honour to be deemed so. But we knew all that before; his pranks and gallantries had long furnished laughter and conversation for every mess and coterie in Sicily.

Castelermo changed colour when we met him. "Valerio

Piozzi;" he whispered to me; "our friend is the identical officer of whom our late acquaintance, the Signor Galdino, was so jealous. Basta! there was good reason to be on the alert, and keep Despina close while he was so near as Catanzaro!"

"I have news for you, Signor Capitano," said Marco, as we lounged from the table d'hôte towards a cantina.

"My friend, I am glad of that," said the captain, with a half yawn; "'tis so deuced dull here, that one seems quite out of the world—entombed—bedevilled!"

"Il cavaliere di Belcastro—"

"Ha!" exclaimed the captain, changing countenance, and turning briskly to Marco, whom he keenly scrutinized through his glass, which never left his eye.

"My gay Valerio, I have a tale to tell which will harrow up your heart, if you have one."

"The deuce!"

"The husband of Despina is dead—"

"The devil! is that all!" exclaimed the captain, with an almost uncontrollable burst of laughter. "That makes me merry," he added, stroking his mustachios, which were well perfumed and pointed with pomatum. "The particulars, caro signor: slain by the brigands, I presume?"

"No, by his own evil passions."

"Faith, they nearly slew even me in Venice," replied Piozzi, who, on hearing of our visit to the villa, tossed his cap into the air.

"Che gioia, what happiness," he exclaimed; "I must to horse, and away to Despina" (I saw poor Marco's brow cloud). "Ola, my horse! Annibale Porko, seek my servant,," he cried, to a sergeant who passed, "and order my horses in an hour." The soldier saluted, and withdrew. "Per Baccho! 'tis joyous news: old Galdino gone to the Styx. Amen! Devil go with him. What a merry bout we shall have.—And his property—all settled on the cavalieressa—bravo, Valerio! luckiest of dogs! Here, Signor Cantiniero, wine—wine! What shall we have, Marco—say, Signor Dundas—you are a judge: Muscatelle?"

"Basta! no—we have had enough of that," said Castelfermo, shrugging his shoulders.

"Ha—ha! I forgot," replied Valerio, with a reckless laugh—"ruddy Burgogna, then,—golden Andalusia—sparkling Champagne, gleaming like diamonds in sunbeams?"

"As you please, I am no connoisseur," said I, and two large crystal jars of the last were speedily summoned.

"Corpo di Baccho! it is a punishment for a Carthusian to reside here, in this dull place on the Adriatic shore," said the captain, as we lounged on the rustic sofas, beneath the vine-covered verandah of the cantina, and pushed the wine-jars about the well-polished table; "positively, I am ennuied to death, and would give a year's pay to find myself once more at Naples, or even at Reggio,—there are some sprightly girls there."

"And yet the women of Catanzaro are considered the fairest in Italy," observed a smart young fellow, with whom we had been conversing on various topics for some time past; he had followed us uninvited from the table d'hôte, where his very handsome features and long fair locks had won him our favour.

"Handsome they may be, but I would not give a lively sewing girl of Naples for the fairest lady in the Calabrias. Ah! had you heard Italian whispered by the dulcet tongues of Venetian girls, you would turn with disgust from the guttural Greek of these poor provincials."

"'Tis a matter of taste," replied our boyish friend, sipping his wine, to conceal the rising colour which glowed on his beardless face. "I am a stranger here, and pretend not to judge of the beauty or vivacity of the ladies: so I presume is this British officer; and the cavaliere di Malta cannot be expected to venture an opinion on such topics."

"Now by all the gods of accursed heathendom!" cried the Italian officer, showing all his white teeth as he laughed boisterously. "Heaven help thine ignorance, most gentle signor of this barbarous land. I have seen at the windows of the Maltese knights fairer faces than all the towns of these wild provinces could produce. These cavaliers are greater connoisseurs than a Turkish dealer in such commodities; for the portentous cross on their breasts does not in any way freeze the heart below, or render it insensible to such impressions. By grey dawn, many a pretty damsel, shrouded in a loose domino, have I seen stealing away from the portal of the knights' palace at Naples; though these cavaliers deport themselves demurely enough by day, the stars do not look on merrier revellers, or more joyous companions; and the Cavaliere Marco knows well the truth of what I affirm. All Italy knows the famous military *dis-order* of Saint John."

"The Cavaliere Marco would advise your lively valour to speak more gently of his order. Some irregularities are doubtless committed by ~~my~~ brethren of the sword and mantle,

but you must bear in memory the saying of the cunning Lucchesi—"There are good and bad people everywhere. Signor, speak not against my order! When I remember what it was but a few years ago—when the church of St. John was hung with the shields of four thousand knights; its marble floors covered with the achievements of those who were gone; and its dome filled with the captured trophies of the infidels—when the unsullied banner of the order waved from the ramparts of Sant' Elmo, and we had galleys at sea and soldiers on the land, my mind is filled with sorrow and regret. When I look back to the glorious days of our illustrious grand master, old Villiers de l'Isle Adam, to those days when six hundred knights, shut up in the island of Rhodes, defended it for six months against two hundred thousand Turks, my soul is filled with exultation and chivalry. So beware, Signor Valerio! The knights of Malta have suffered so much of late from the usurpation of Buonaparte and the unfulfilled and often reiterated promises of Britain, that they have grown somewhat petulant and hasty."

"Enough, signor—I sit rebuked, and submit quietly, knowing that I may be a little in error," answered the frank officer. "But to change the subject; if I am not soon recalled to head-quarters, I shall have to quit this Catanzaro without beat of drum. The air of the place is getting quite too hot for me; I have been here only three weeks, and in that time contracted debts to the amount of some thousand ducats. I tried the rouge et noir—abomination! they only made matters worse, and the villanous shop-people, the podestà, the eletti, and the tipstaves, are all ready to pounce upon me *en masse*; worse than all, the women of the place are at drawn daggers about me."

"You are quite to be envied!" said the young Calabrian, with an air of impatient scorn.

"You shall hear whether it be so," replied the captain. "Ah! the uniform of the Queen's Italian guard is something new here; and, in truth, we have been rather free with our favours; myself in particular. Three narrow escapes have been the consequence (these Calabrians are wondrously prone to assassination); once from the knife of a rascal hired by some frail fair one unknown, and once from a dose of bella-donna, with which an angry damsel contrived to drug my chocolate the other morning; when I was just about to drink it, she threw herself at my feet in an agony of sorrow and horror, imploring my pity and forgiveness; so, after abund-

ance of tears, threats, upbraiding, and all that sort of thing I quietly put her outside the door"—

"And the third, signor; the third?" said the young Calabrian, impatiently.

"Was from the poisoned weapon of a furious brother, whose sister I had jilted, and grown weary of. Ah! the cowardly dog! he called it honour, I think; rather amusing in this rustic land of fauns and satyrs. But the adventure would have gone otherwise with me, had not my trusty serjeant, Annibale Porko, sucked the wound, and bathed it with brandy. Behold! 'tis yet far from well," he added, pulling up the richly laced sleeve of his white uniform, and showing a long scar above the wrist.

"Faith!" said I, "if you have many such scrapes, Captain Piozzi, you are likely to be cut off, and suddenly; an Italian seldom brooks a wrong."

"But I cannot comprehend the nature of these unpolished Calabrians," replied this heedless, harum-scarum gallant, into whose empty head the wine was rapidly mounting. "Per Baccho! they are mere savages—Hottentots! Will you believe it? if I venture to pay a compliment to the mistress of my billet, or to kiss her daughter (which I am often disposed to do, the said daughter being rather fresh and pretty), the maestro di casa jerks up his Messina sash, twirls his whiskers, and plays so ominously with the haft of his knife, that I am compelled to keep my gallantry within very narrow bounds. I must even refrain from those little acts of cavalier-like politeness, by which some obliging citizens of Naples would consider themselves duly honoured; more especially if it were a noble gentiluomo of the queen's guard that deigned to salute one of his family. O! for joyous Venice, and its money-making mothers, who for sixty sequins—"

"Basta!" interrupted Marco, "you let every one hear you, Valerio, by speaking in such a key. By St. Antony!"

"Hush, Marco, 'tis quite unfashionable to swear by these old saints; the newest canonizations are always most in vogue. St. Antony, indeed! The ancient fool; I would rather swear by his gridiron, which the monks show as Rimini. But to resume. Here, in this cursed province, if one but looks at a woman, cold iron is thought of instantly, and one may be dead as Brutus in less time than one can utter a credo.—What the deuce can delay my rogue of a groom?"

"You labour under so many annoyances, that I am asto-

nished you have survived them," observed the young provincial, contemptuously.

"By the jovial San Cupido! you know not half of them. As my soldiers are apt to imitate their accomplished commander in many things, the king's service has lost several smart fellows in these domestic brawls. But courage, Valerio! It is quite a godsend, this sudden death of that bear, old Belcastro; and as the charming Despina is so near, I shall hope to pay her many a visit of condolence. Nay, frown not, Marco, my love for her is of the most pure and Platonic description. Besides, I have sent a most heart-rending memorial to the queen, and it is so well seconded and flanked by the duchessa di Bagnara, and other fair ladies, who are impatient for my return, that I have no doubt my party will soon be ordered to rejoin at Palermo, without my troubling our gruff commander-in-chief, Giambattista Fardella. Then, adieu to Catanzaro, its wickedness, and its women."

"And Signora Teresa with the rest?" asked the Calabrian, with a low voice and a flushing cheek.

"Ha! know you Teresa Navona?" asked the captain, scanning the fine features of the youth with a keen glance. "Do you belong to Catanzaro?"

"Yes, signor,—no. That is, not now," stammered the boy, with angry confusion. "But I once resided here, and have only just returned, after a long absence. You know Teresa?"

"As well as man can know such a compound of fascination and subtlety as an Italian woman," laughed the handsome guardsman. "You are to learn, gentlemen, that this is the escapade I spoke of; the duel with the devil of a brother. There was a judge of the grand civil court of Cosenza, who died here lately, after living in retirement since our friends the French crossed the Alps. This learned old fellow had two daughters, Pompeia and Teresa; the first I have never seen, but the last, who resides with her mother here, has been for some time past the happy means of cheering my dreary detachment duty in the towns hereabout; and truly the girl is a magnificent creature for a Calabrian! Her bright eyes and ruby lips are Italian; her white skin, full bosom, and long flowing hair, have come with the Greek blood; and her vivacity is quite oriental."

"Was, you should say," muttered the young man. "Aias! signor, her vivacity has fled since you knew her."

"In short, Captain Riozzi, you have had an intrigue," said I.

"Right, signor," he replied, composedly; "but one fraught with the due proportion of mystery and cold steel which usually accompany an Italian intrigue. It being discovered that I had carried the fortress by a *coup de main*, the girl Teresa was consigned to that convent yonder, the campanile of which you now see shining in the sun; and the mother solaced herself with strong hysterics and strong waters until the arrival of her son, a fiery young subaltern of the Sicilian volunteers, who galloped across from the camp of St. Eufemia, with the express purpose of parading me.

"Three days ago, when returning from this wine-house, and just under the Madonna at the street corner yonder, this young spark assaulted me sword in hand, flinging his hat on the ground, and his cloak round his left arm, in the most approved duellist fashion. So furious was his onset, that I had scarcely time to stand on my guard, but we thrust and cut at each other like any two bravos on the boards of the San Carlo; my superior skill soon overcame the Herculean strength of the Calabrese officer, and the fifth passado laid him dead at my feet."

"Madonna mia!" exclaimed the Calabrian, smiting his breast with horror.

"The devil!" I exclaimed; "poor fellow, and you really killed him?"

"Not quite, signor; but old Porko, I believe, brained him with his halberd," was the cool reply.

"The villain, Porko, shall answer dearly for this mutiny and murder!" exclaimed Castelfermo, with an aspect of severity. "And so, signor Piozzi, you have gone from bad to worse; first outraged the confiding sister, and then destroyed the spirited brother!"

"Cospetto!" muttered Piozzi, "I know these things will sound ill at the court, and in old Fardella's office at Palermo, whatever they may be thought of at our mess-house on the Cassero."

"But how will they appear in the court of heaven, on that dread day, when all men will be judged by their deeds?" asked the Maltese commander, with a stern expression, which, however, did not abash our volatile friend.

"Admirable!" he replied, waving his cigar, "you act the military monk to the life. That sort of air did very well in L'Isle Adam's days, but it won't pass now, Marco, so pray lay it aside, or assume it only in the convent at Malta, or the palace at Naples, and for the present be the frank cavalier of the last hour. A proud spirit cannot brook an admonitory

tone. Ah! here comes my rascally groom at last; while he loiters with that girl yonder, let us drink to la Signora Teresa. Her family, if they be wise, will hush the matter up, and she may yet marry some honest artisan, who will deem her none the worse for having a few ducats from Valerio Pionzi, captain of the Royal Italian guard, knight grand cross of San Marco, and heaven knows what more."

The eyes of the young Calabrese flashed fire.

"And think you, base ruffian," he exclaimed, in a voice shrill and tremulous with rage, "that old Albanian Greeks, though now sunk to the grade of mere Italian citizens, will forget that their blood has descended to them from the long line of the princes of Epirus, and permit these foul wrongs to pass without retribution?"

"Insolent brat, I neither know nor care!" replied the captain, grasping his riding switch, and regarding the bold youth sternly; "and but that your chin is smooth as an apple—poh! I can bandy word and blow with any blusterer in Italy, and shall not shrink from a peasant or woodcutter of this rustic land; but now, since the days of chivalry have passed away, tell me, my pretty Messerino, who will become the champion of this fallen star? and, save myself, to whom can she look for redress?"

"To the right hand of her sister, since death has left none other to avenge her," cried the youth, in a voice rising almost to a shriek, and the bright barrel of a pistol glittered in the sunlight which streamed between the vine leaves of the trellis. Levelling it full at Valerio, *she* fired, just as I struck up her weapon. From the tone of the voice, and the despair that glared in the eye, there flashed upon me a suspicion of the sex and purpose of this youth.

The ball dashed to pieces the head of the large waxen Madonna, which occupied a lofty niche at the corner of the street. A cry of "sacrilege," and "murder!" arose, and the people rushed towards us from all quarters. As the smoke cleared, we discovered the imperturbable captain stroking his moustache, and smiling grimly, but with an air of exquisite nonchalance.

"Thrice my heart failed me, but he is destroyed at last!" cried Pompeia, in terrible accents, as she cast away the pistol (which she had fired with both her eyes closed), and sinking back on the rustic sofa, burst into a passion of tears.

"Holy St. John of Jerusalem and of Rhodes, look here!" exclaimed Castelfermo, while I seized her, that she might not escape.

"Wretch!" muttered Marco.

"I am wretched, indeed!" she replied bitterly, still keeping her eyes closed, "yet I do not deem myself so abject as to be grasped thus with impunity. Unhand me, signor, I have only slain the destroyer of my sister's peace, my brother's life (perhaps my mother's too), and the fame of our family. Guiltless of wanton wickedness, I have only destroyed a ribald and reckless libertine, in the midst of his sinful boasting."

"Here is a devil of a damsel!" said Valerio, with a laugh. 'Per Baccho! a pestilent, narrow escape it was. But for you, signor Claude, I might have been chaffering with Charon for a passage across the Styx, and squabbling, perhaps, with old Belcastro on the voyage. To your care I commend this amiable sample of her sex, while I canter off to the villa of Despina."

His servant at that moment rode up with a led horse, and he leaped into the saddle.

"Wretch!" shrieked Pompeia, "hast thou escaped that death so richly merited?"

"Safe and sound, my pretty termagant—aim better next time," replied the officer, caracoling his horse, to push back the clamorous crowd. "Adieu, Caro Marco! adieu, signor Claude! your most humble servant, my pretty Pompeia. Ola! keep out of my horse's way, signori the rabble, and so, buona sera, good-evening to everybody;" and, with a reckless laugh, he dashed off at a gallop through the street, which was darkening fast, as the sun had set. He was followed by a volley of execrations from the crowd, some of whom he tumbled into the kennel, as he pushed headlong through.

"Unhand me, signor," said the damsel, with an assumption of dignity. "I am a Calabrese woman, and all Calabria will applaud the deed!"

A shout arose from the admiring populace; yet the girl trembled with shame, sorrow, and anger.

"But not so will He into whose awful presence you were about to hurl a fellow-being, with many grievous sins and follies accumulated on his head. You would have destroyed him, body and soul; he would have passed away unbidden, unconfessed, and unforgiven! Heaven judge between him and thee, woman! but in this matter you have acted unwisely. Madonna grant forgiveness to you both!" added Marco, signing the cross.

"Madonna grant it!" muttered the rabble round us, bowing their heads.

"I am not a child to be preached to, either by canon regular or church militant!" retorted this fiery damsel. She was a noble-looking beauty, about twenty, with long dark lashes, silken hair, and ripe pouting lips, which consorted oddly with her broad hat and black surtout, of the newest Neapolitan cut. The colour was fast returning to her pallid cheek, and the fire of her eyes had never dimmed. "Lead me to the podestà of Catanzaro! by him will I be judged, but not by a knight of the Maltese cross."

"No, signora," replied Castelfermo, "I am not prosecutor in this matter; to your own sorrows and conscience I leave you—adieu!" and she was led away by the people, her face buried in her mantle, and utterly deserted by that stern confidence which had sustained her throughout this wild affair.

Sergeant Annibale Porko we reported to the officer next in command, who promised to send him to St. Eufemio for trial by court-martial, a pledge which he never re-deemed.

About an hour after Ave-Maria rang, we quitted the mountain town of Catanzaro, and struck directly across the country, with the intention of visiting the villa d'Alfieri.

Not long after this affair, I remember Castelfermo handing me, with a cold and grim smile, a copy of the "*Gazzetta Britannica*," in which there was a paragraph, announcing that our wild friend the captain had been married to the widow of Belcastro, with great splendour, at the archiepiscopal residence of the bishop of Cosenza.

From that hour I never again heard him utter the name of Despina.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRANCATRIPA, THE BRIGAND.

I WAS AWARE that, according to strict orders, I ought to have proceeded forthwith, without deviation or delay, to Scylla, but a detour of twenty miles, to visit my gentle Bianca, could not in any way injure the service; and how seldom is it when campaigning that the impulse of one's own heart can be obeyed! Too often does duty interfere with the best and tenderest affections of the soldier, sending him forth with a heart seared and almost broken, to fight the battles of his country; or, still worse, to close a long life of expatriation, by perishing amid the pestilent swamps of the West, or the wars and diseases of the East Indies.

We were now getting within the vicinity of the redoubtable brigand Francatripa, and his terrible handiwork became manifest at every mile of the way, as we neared his stronghold in the forest of St. Eufemio. In a solitary pass we found a carriage, apparently from Naples, a wreck by the wayside, with its springs broken, and one of the mules lying shot between the traces. The trunks, which had been strapped before and behind, were rifled; the morocco lining had been ripped and torn down in search of concealed valuables, and the gilt panels were riddled by musket-balls.

The unfortunate traveller, scarcely alive, lay half out of the vehicle, his head on the ground, covered with wounds, and bleeding profusely; he seemed to have offered a desperate resistance, for one hand grasped a discharged pistol, while the other yet clenched a poniard. We raised him gently, and laid him on the slope of a grassy bank, where his clammy white face and glazing eyes glimmered horribly in the cold moonlight.

"Signor," said Castelfermo, as he knelt down and held his crucifix before the eyes of the dying sufferer, "tell us who committed this detestable outrage?"

"Francatripa!" muttered the quivering lips of the dying man, who immediately expired. We then placed the body within the carriage, and after fastening the doors to protect it from the wolves, rode towards a village which lay about a league off, to rouse the peasantry.

A little farther on, we passed a poor country girl, weeping over the body of an aged shepherd, whose dog sat whining at

his feet. The old man had been slain by a blow from the butt of a musket. His daughter supported his head in her lap, bedewing it with tears, and wiping the blood from his pale, lifeless face and silver hairs with her linen head-dress, while she mingled with her prayers many an anathema on the name of "Francatripa!" Around lay the ruins of their hut; the old man had perished in defence of his flock, and the extreme youth of the girl had alone saved her from being carried off to the stronghold of the brigands.

As we approached the village, the white cottages of which shone in the moonlight on the dark-green mountain side, a lurid flame shot across the sky: they were in flames! Then the reports of musketry were heard; a skirmish had ensued between the brigands and the armed peasantry; the latter had been defeated, and the unrelenting lieutenant of Francatripa, after laying their dwellings in ashes, leisurely retreated up the hills with his band.

"Satan seems abroad to-night!" said I, as the wailing of women and children was borne past us on the night-breeze.

"Since the days of Marco Sciarra, such outrages as these have been matters of daily occurrence in our mountain provinces," replied the cavalier. "These villains have probably been foraging in the valley; and desolation and death invariably attend resistance. But, perhaps, the villagers may have been guilty of some disloyalty to our cause, and have thus brought upon them the vengeance of Francatripa, who is one of Carolina's robber-knights, and by her authority bears the rank of colonel. Alas! signor, you see how war calls forth all the worst traits of the Calabrian character. When I look on these things, I blush that I am an Italian."

"Truly," said I, "we have seen some things which make me suppose there is more of truth than malice in the old Italian proverb applied to the Neapolitan people."

"*Naples is a paradise inhabited by devils!*" replied Marco. "Ha! I fought a Tuscan on the ramparts of Valetta one morning, for uttering that impertinent saying."

On reaching the hamlet we found the greater number of the cottages burned down; and the only answers our inquiries received were, "the king of the forest, Francatripa—the hunchback—the devil!"

A man warned us not to proceed, for the banditti were still hovering about; but as only one pass of the mountains lay between us and Maida, we determined to push forward at all risks. After examining our girths and pistol-locks, we dashed at a gallop into a gorge of the hills, which seemed doubly

dark after leaving the blaze of the burning hamlet, being also deprived of the moon, whose light was intercepted by a gigantic peak of the Apennines.

The hoofs of our galloping horses alone broke the stillness around us, until we had reached the centre of the pass or chasm, where the frowning cliffs arose on each side like sable walls, their summits, in some places, overhanging the base; when, hark! the shrill blast of a Calabrian horn, waking the echoes of that dismal hollow, caused us to rein suddenly up and prepare for action. As the reverberations of the horn died away, a glare of crimson light burst through the gloom; it burned steadily, increasing in radiance and splendour, tinging hills and rock, the forms of ourselves and horses, with the hue of blood, and shedding over the whole landscape, woodland, hill, and hollow, the same sanguine tint. This effect, at any other time, or under other circumstances, we should have admired; at it was, our lives were in jeopardy, and delight gave place to apprehension.

An enormous red light, blazing on a pinnacle of rock, distinctly revealed our position and appearance to a horde of banditti, in conical hats or long blue caps and gay parti-coloured garments, who swarmed on the cliffs above and around us, barring advance or retreat, with their levelled rifles.

"Basta!" exclaimed Castelfermo, his voice faltering with shame and chagrin. "O! for thirty cavaliers of John de Valette, or old L'Isle Adam! Must we yield—and to wretches such as these?"

"Surrender or die!" I replied, considerably excited; "the path is open before us; but we should assuredly be blown to pieces before we had moved a horse's length."

We were immediately surrounded, and peremptorily commanded to dismount. I saw how the fierce spirit of my companion blazed up within him as he obeyed the order; and my own indignation was not less. Our swords were next demanded; and, knowing the futility of resistance, I submitted to be deprived of my sabre and despatches.

"My good fellows," said I, "remember I am a British officer!"

"Base vagabonds!" thundered Castelfermo, while his pale lips quivered with rage, "at least respect the garb I wear! You may keep my sword, now, for to me it is useless, after being sullied by such dishonourable hands; but bear in mind that this night you have committed a most horrid sacrilege!"

"We will bear the weight of that easily, cavaliere," said one fellow, "and pay our blessed mother church a moiety out of your ransom. We must obey our orders; and if Ferdinand IV., or even the grand bailiff of the province passed this way, they would be required to yield both cloak-bag and sword to the king of St. Eufemio."

"Take the matter quietly, signor," said another, striking me on the shoulder with insolent familiarity; "remember you might have fallen into rougher hands than Francatripa's free companions."

"Bring a horse-halter, ho! ho! and bind them!" cried a shrill voice, which I immediately recognised. I turned towards the speaker, who had just dropped down from the rocks; but could not distinguish his figure, the blaze of the red light having now expired.

"By Heaven! I would not have surrendered without fighting to the last, could I have suspected this foul indignity!" exclaimed Marco bitterly, while I bit my lips in silence; and Gaspare Truffi, by whose orders we were bound, rolled on the turf, yelling and grinning like a fiend, with malicious delight and exultation.

"Forward!" he commanded. "Where did you say we were to meet the capitano?"

"Where the Maida road intersects the ancient way to the town of Cosenza," replied one of the band. "He awaits us among the old ruins of those pagan Greeks."

"On then," replied the little man of authority. "On, but *povero voi!* keep well together when crossing the hills, or I will blow to the night wind the brains of the first man who straggles!"

I was surprised to find these fierce desperadoes submitting to the incessant hectoring of a pitiful hunchback; but after a time I observed that his commands, although strictly obeyed, were a source of secret merriment to the band. I also discovered amongst them many young men of superior birth, address, and education, who had been reduced to such ignoble fellowship by their own excesses, or by preferring a state of free brigandage on their native mountains, to bowing beneath the yoke of France, and submitting to its military conscription.

Some of them still retained in their manners traces of good Neapolitan society, but the majority were a crew of the most hardened ruffians that ever were congregated together. I fully expected on being presented to the leader, to experience the most brutal treatment, having been always led to suppose that Francatripa was a very demon incarnate,

and, save Mammone, the worst of all the outlaws of lawless Calabria.

"Now, then, gentlemen, remember that with my own hand I will shoot the first who attempts to escape. Hear me! *you* in particular!" said Gaspare Truffi, giving his threat additional force by bestowing on my shoulder a smart stroke with a pistol butt (one of my own silver-mounted pops with rifled barrels, a present from the general.) At that moment, my heart swelled almost to bursting. I turned fiercely towards Truffi; but, on beholding him astride my gallant grey, with his short crooked legs scarcely reaching below the saddle flaps, his prodigious hump, his over-grown head and amply-bearded visage surmounted by a straw hat of the largest size, his grotesque figure viewed by the moonlight was so ludicrous, that I burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. Even the grave Castelfermo laughed aloud, and the whole band joined in a hearty roar of merriment. This, though it put us all in tolerable humour, roused the wrath of the hunchback, who glared from one to another, without knowing on whom to wreak his passion.

"It is quite a riddle to me how this odd fellow was ever permitted beneath the roof of the St. Agata palace; you remember, we first met him there," said I to my companion.

"The cursed reptile played well and deeply; but I doubt much if he would again dare to approach——"

"Silenzio!" thundered the hunchback, as he forced Cartouche (whom he could scarcely manage) toward me, sideways, and twice endeavoured to ride over me; but the brave charger knew me too well, and always swerved aside when approaching too close. Failing thus in his object, Gaspare dealt me a blow on the mouth with the pistol-butt, which covered my face with blood, and nearly demolished my front teeth. The band murmured at this cowardly outrage, and perhaps nothing but fear of Francatipa prevented his incensed lieutenant from pistolling me on the spot.

We had now arrived at the place appointed; the ruins of a majestic fane, which had once echoed the precepts of Pythagoras, and the triumphs of Milo; its massive Doric columns, the ponderous abacus, and carved entablature, with the most exquisite specimens of sculpture, were all hurled together in chaotic heaps just as the temple had been left by some tremendous convulsion, which had levelled its glories to the dust. The stones were mossy and green, the vine and ivy, the scarlet fuchsia and the wild rose, and a thousand odorous plants flourished luxuriantly, and entwined the ruins with wreaths

of blossom. But there was something melancholy in the aspect of the place when viewed by the brilliant moon,—the same orb which had beheld the first stone of their foundations laid, amid all the religious solemnities of pagan Greece.

A horn was sounded, but the echoes died away, and no answering blast awoke them again; the ruins were minutely searched, but there was no appearance of Francatripa.

"Maladetto!" said one fellow, shrugging his shoulders, "the capitano stays somewhat long with his dear love to-night!"

"Colonello, you should say, Gaetano," replied another. "Does he not bear the king's commission? ay, and a sweet letter, they say, Carolina sent him, written with her own hand."

"Yes, and we are to become soldiers, like the men of Marco Sciarra. Madonna bless the day! I am tired of this life."

"Gaetano is as bad as his master, who seems to love a throw of the dice at the gaming-table better than a rifle-shot on the green mountain-side in the merry moonlight."

Gaetano only answered by a sigh.

"The smiles must have been sweeter to-night than usual," growled Gaspare Truffi; "he stays so long at the villa D'Alfieri."

"No good will come of his going there; where a woman is, there will always be treachery and mischief," said Gaetano. "May Cupid put it in his heart to bring his girl up the mountains!"

"Welcome to the capitanessa!" said another of the band, drinking from a leathern bottle, which he held aloft at the full stretch of his arm, permitting the sparkling wine to stream down his throat—a famous feat with the Italian vulgar.

"Ho! ho!" chuckled the hunchback, "it would be bearding the grand bailiff with a vengeance, to follow Gaetano's advice. But, Sfarmato! wind the horn again!"

Once more its blast was poured to the hollow wind; but there was no reply, save from the echoing woods of Maide; and the banditti, as they seated themselves on the verdant grass and marble blocks, cursed the delay of their leader in no gentle terms.

The villa D'Alfieri! How my pulses quickened at the sound. Francatripa was then the lover of Annina, or some of the waiting women. I resolved to speak with the vis-

contessa about the dangerous friends with whom her household corresponded. How little I then knew of the ambition and presumption of that accomplished robber!

"Here, good fellow," said I to the one whom they named Gaetano, "take the handkerchief from my breast, and give my moustaches a wipe. You see how freely the blood is flowing from my mouth."

"Certainly, signor cavalier," said the man, good-naturedly, raising his hand to his hat.

"Ha!" said I, "you have been a soldier?"

"Yes, signor," said he, turning pale, "I enlisted in the Corsican Rangers, under the British; but I knew not their fashions; I quarrelled with a serjeant, and they flogged me like a dog; I ran away, and so I am here."

Before he could do me the simple act of kindness requested, Gaspare snatched the handkerchief from his hand, and threw it away, dealing Gaetano at the same time a sound box on the ear, and muttering a remark, which, when translated, meant that I might "bleed to death, and be ——"

I was extremely exasperated; and feeling at that moment the cords which bound me becoming a little slackened, I snapped them asunder, and rushing upon Truffi unhorsed him like lightning; then snatching from him his pistols and poniard, I threw them to a distance. He swore a terrible oath, and grappled with me. I was amazed by the strength he displayed; although barely the height of a well-grown boy, he appeared to possess the strength of two ordinary men, and his arms and hands were of great size and muscular power. My breast burned with shame, to find myself more than matched in the grasp of a creature so despicable; I would rather have died than have been defeated. The brigands, aware of their little lieutenant's great strength, confidently expected he would overcome me; so, without interfering, they leant upon their rifles, and with shouts of laughter, crowded round to witness a contest which Castelfermo beheld with equal indignation and astonishment; he, of course, supposed I should toss my adversary into the air like a cricket-ball.

At any other time, or under different circumstances, I would have scorned to encounter in any manner such an adversary; but, alas! I found myself almost mastered by this miraculous dwarf.

Firm as Hercules, he stood planted on his curved legs, which appeared to possess all the unyielding principle of the

arch ; while his huge head, round and hard as a cannon-ball, was thrust like a battering-ram into my breast, and his ample hands grasped me like a vice ; he had all the aspect of some powerful gnome, or dwarf, of German romance ; but dwarf or devil, I was determined not to yield while bone and muscle remained firm.

While quartered at Truro, I had been taught a few of the tricks of wrestling by a corporal of the Cornish miners, and I now put all these in practice against this crooked Italian, who, being quite unprepared for any display of science, was suddenly thrown off his feet, and hurled backwards with such force, that he fell on the sward about ten yards off, and nearly fractured his capacious skull, which was instantly buried in the deep recesses of his conical hat.

"Ghieu !" cried he, scrambling up. "Ho, ho ! woe betide you, povero voi !"

He was rushing forward, like a mad bull, to renew the conflict, when a figure stepped from behind a fragment of the ruins, and interposed between us.

"Francatripa !" he exclaimed, recoiling with a growl of surprise.

"Most excellent captain !" cried the thieves, with one voice. "Viva Francatripa !"

"Silence all, comrades," said Francatripa ; "and you, signor," he added, addressing himself to me, "I thank you for giving my lieutenant this rough lesson to treat my prisoners better. But inform me, circumstantially, on your honour, who you are, whence you have come, where you are bound, and what is your business among these mountains ?"

"I am an officer on the Sicilian staff, bearing despatches from the commanding officer at Crotona to General Sir John Stuart at Scylla. I trust my papers will be restored me, as they can be of no use to you, sir, and the service of King Ferdinand may suffer by their detention."

"Madonna keep his most sacred majesty !" said the robber chief, uncovering ; "your horse and baggage shall be restored to you, and all letters addressed to the good Cavaliere Stuardo, the friend of Naples. Signor, we war not with the soldier, unless in arms against us ; like our own, his profession is a poor one, and shame fall on the hand that would pilfer his hard-earned ducats—the wages of sweat, toil, and blood. But the gentleman who accompanies you ? By the star of heaven ! a knight of Malta ! This is sacrilege ! Pardon, signor cavaliere, this outrage by my people ; one for which, believe me,

on my word of honour, as a free Calabrian, I am in no way to blame. Gastano, restore to these gentlemen their swords."

Unbinding Castelermo himself, he ordered our horses to be instantly led up to us.

"Gaspere!" he exclaimed, while grasping a pistol, "thou accursed, deformed Judas, thou piece of an ass! I would this instant send a bullet through your brain, had I another to supply your place; for, truly, there is not in all Italy another such subtle serpent and compound of mischief, to whom I could delegate my troublesome command when absent. But keep out of my sight till morning, Messerino Escop! Signori, he has the eyes of Argus, and is worth his hump in gold to me, so that I could ill spare him. Meanwhile, to make all the amends in my power, this night you shall sup with me, and to-morrow pursue your journey. Please to step this way, gentlemen, and we shall see what my cook has in preparation for us."

He led us behind a lofty mass of the rains, where heavy green laurels and clusters of ivy and vine overhung the marble blocks and fragments of fluted columns, which yet remained in their original position. A whole roebuck was roasting and sputtering before a wood fire, which cast its red and varying glare on the shattered temple, the waving foliage, the glancing arms, and fierce, swart visages of our captors, whose well-known bandit costume completed the striking effect of the scene.

A beetle-browed and bare-legged rogue, clad only in yellow breeches and a blue shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up, superintended the cooking; while the contents of a hamper (taken probably from the carriage we had seen some hours before) were spread upon the turf, light pastries, fruit, and a few flasks of continental wine. After posting a few well-accounted scouts on the neighbouring roads and eminences, Francatripa sent away his band to join the main body in the forest, where several hundred wild spirits served under him. After seeing them off, in a manner which was a burlesque on military order, this formidable chief—who afterwards fought so many severe battles with the French, and whose name was soon to become like that of Marco Sciarra in Italy—rejoined us. I had then an opportunity of recognizing in him one of the mutilators of the poor tanner (mentioned before), and I also remembered his face as one I had often seen in the fashionable gaming-houses of Messina.

He was an eminently handsome man, between thirty and forty years of age, and being closely shaved, he had rather a more civilised aspect than his rough, whiskered and bearded associates. Though to us polite and courteous in the extreme, to his band he acted the furious and swaggering bandit; stern firmness and sullen ferocity alone seemed to keep their mutinous spirits in check, and they quailed beneath his sparkling eye whenever it turned on them.

He was habited in one of those richly-laced scarlet uniforms which Queen Caroline sent from Palermo to Benincasa, the miller of Sorà, and all the brigand chiefs of those provinces; and on his breast shone the star and enamelled cross of St. Constantine, the gift of the same politic princess, who endeavoured to prop the tottering throne of her husband by the support of the brave banditti of southern Naples, just as the Venetians, in 1590, courted the aid of the chivalric Sciarra and his followers against the grand duke of Tuscany. A plume of white ostrich feathers, clasped by a golden band and diamond madonna, drooped from his broad hat over his right shoulder, imparting a peculiar grace to his figure. His belt sustained a very handsome sword, poniard, and pistols, which, with a short rifle, completed the arms and accoutrements of this gallant robber; his air and aspect were very different from those of the desperado who, under his name, usually figured in the accounts published in the Neapolitan and Sicilian cities.

We supped heartily. The wine was excellent; and if Francatripa came by it lightly, he did not spare it on his guests. The flasks of red and white capri were numerous and potent enough; but when I remembered the unhappy proprietor, whom we had found weltering in blood by the wayside, it was not without considerable compunction that I regaled on the contents of his plundered hamper. However, the affair lay between Francatripa and his conscience. Castelermo and I soon fell asleep under a sheltered part of the ruins which had witnessed the midnight carousal.

When we awoke, the morning sun had risen far above the hills of Maida; our horses with our arms and valises, all in perfect order, stood picqueted beside us, but our late host and his followers had departed, leaving no trace behind them, save the well-picked venison bones, and the ashes of the fire which had cooked it. My mouth was still painful, and a little swollen by the blow from the hunchback, whom I hoped to repay at a future time; but I sprang gaily up, to rub down

Cartouche with a tuft of dried grass, and shook off the dreams and odd fancies which had floated through my brain, caused, doubtless, by the capri wine, and the stories related by Francatipa of his mountain friends. My ears yet rang with the exploits of the Abbot Proni, who drove the French from Abruzzi; of Frà Diavolo, the cruel and vindictive bandit of Itri; of the miller of Sora, and Benedetto Mangone, who was so savagely executed at Naples, by being beaten to death with hammers.

Mammone, of Sora, was no ordinary bandit, but a fiend in human shape, out-Heroding in cruelty all the monsters of romance; he could boast of having slain with his own hand four hundred fellow-beings; he never dined without having "a bleeding human head placed on the table," and in his mildest mood is said to have drunk human blood "gushing from his victims."

These, and such as these, were the brigand leaders of Italy, and the terror of France, before the merciless General Manhès—"the man of iron"—brought the Calabrian war of extermination to a close, by almost depopulating the country.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

PASSING through Maida—a large and substantial town, built on an eminence equidistant from the Tyrrhene sea and the Adriatic, at the narrowest part of the peninsula, and situated among those pine-clad mountains which overlook the scene of our victory, and the vale of the Amato—we visited the battle-ground, but nothing remained to mark that glorious day, save the burnt cartridge-paper fluttering about among the graves of those who fell; the mould was yet fresh, and the new grass just beginning to sprout above the great burial-mounds, the sight of which at that moment filled us with sad thoughts. The sun shone brightly, pouring his noonday glory from above the wooded Apennines, across the warm and misty plain; bees were humming, birds chirping, and wild flowers blooming, above those "scattered heaps" where so many brave men were mouldering into dust.

This melancholy train of thought, and the deep solitude

around us, were broken by a most unexpected shout of "Hark forward! tally-ho!" coming from a distance; and presently two noble English greyhounds, in full chase after a spotted lynx, bounded from the banks of the Amato, and swept across the plain towards the hills.

"There they go, neck and neck. Bravo, Springer!" cried a well-known voice, and, crashing headlong through the vine-trellis of some poor peasant, Oliver Lascelles, the general's extra aide, dashed up to us, breathless with a long ride. Oliver was the most determined sportsman in the regiment, and contrived to take his horses and dogs wherever he went, in spite of barrack, ordnance, and transport regulations.

"There go the gallant dogs, and I have no horn to recall them," he cried. "See how the spotted devil doubles!—the water now! Ha! the scent's lost, and Springer's at fault. What on earth are you doing here, Dundas? Moralizing, eh? Buon giorno, signor Marco, happy to see you. By the lord! had I got that lynx's brush, I would have stuck it in my cocked hat, and ridden with it so to old Regnier, at Cassano. Ha! Dundas, at home you never roused such game as that, by the Muirfute hills, or in Arniston woods," and the light-hearted Englishman, laughing at his own conceit, hallooed on his dogs till the blue welkin rang.

He congratulated me on my promotion to a company in the regiment de Rolle, from which I was re-gazetted to my old corps, a double favour, which I had no doubt was to be attributed to the general's favourable mention of me in his despatches, and my good fortune in capturing the eagle. This trophy, by the bye, may now be seen in the hall of Chelsea Hospital, in company with thirteen others.

Poor Oliver! he found his grave beneath the towers of the Castello d'Ischia, where the waves roll over the bones of many a bold Calabrian and Ross-shire Highlander. He was barely twenty when he was shot at the head of his stormers.

After a hurried ride over the well-known positions of the 3rd of July, we separated, Casteltermo and I to pursue our journey to St. Eufemio, and Lascelles to continue his to General Regnier's camp; he was the bearer of a copy of Sir John Stuart's third proclamation, dated 18th July, and issued in consequence of the barbarous cruelties exercised by the French troops on those Italian royalists who unhappily fell into their hands. In that official document, after a long statement of appalling facts, Sir John reminded the French general, that three thousand of their soldiers were prisoners

to the British arms, together with many of Buonaparte's well-known partisans. "If, therefore," concluded the manifesto, "such violence is not put an end to, for the future, I shall not only deem myself justified, but compelled by my duty, to have recourse to the severe but indispensable law of *EXECUTIONS*!" This determined threat had some effect on the iron-hearted Ragnier, and for a time we heard less of slaughtered peasantry and priests shot before their altars; of nuns and poor country girls, torn from their homes and hiding-places, to become worse than slaves in the camps and bivouacs of the French, who were yet intrenched at Cassano, awaiting the advance of Massena's division.

Not choosing to be seen so far out of our proper road by any of our troops cantoned in St. Eufemio, or encamped around it, we took a solitary path across the plain towards the villa, and, as there was no ford, we had to swim our horses across the Amato, in a part where the stream was both deep and rapid. We then sought the shelter of an orange-grove, where, having poured the water out of our boots, we passed the noon-time, until the intense heat passed away. It was a still and solitary place, where the silence was broken by no ruder sounds than the hum of the bee, the flap of the plover's wing, the murmur of the Amato, the notes of a shepherd's zampogna, and the faint tinkling bells of his flock afar off on the green and verdant mountains. We remained nearly two hours in that delightful grove, through the thick foliage of which the hot rays of the sun never penetrated; the shining river swept slowly past us to the sea, with its smooth surface glittering in the sunlight, and the whole air was fragrant with the perfume of the wild flowers blooming among its sedges, and the orange-trees which shaded its rocky banks. The ruddy fruit hung in rich golden clusters above us; and though, from the appearance of some of the trees, the winds of a hundred years had swept their branches, they were yet, in a "green old age," bending beneath their load of produce. The Calabrian knows well that the oldest trees bear the sweetest oranges,—those that are soft and juicy, with thin skins; the thickly-rinded are always the fruit of young saplings, and are seldom cared for by the orange-gatherer.

Cavaliere Marco—who had not such reasons as I for visiting the villa, and whose knowledge of the world led him to suppose that his presence could, perhaps, be dispensed with—suddenly recollected that he had a gambling affair with Ser Villani, the lawyer (there was only one in the province), and

ride on to St. Eufemio, promising to rejoin me in a few hours. Meanwhile, I pursued my way to the villa alone, and, passing through its luxuriant orchards, reached the terraces, unperceived by any of the inhabitants.

Leaving my horse under the portico, I passed through a white marble corridor into the lofty and superb saloon, where, through a cupola of stained glass, covered with heraldic blazoury, the sun poured down a flood of variegated light upon three rows of gilded galleries and a bronze fountain;—the Neapolitan emblem, a winged horse, vomited forth a jet of sparkling water. Save the ceaseless plash of the fountain, the place was silent,—no sounds of life were heard.

After a time, however, the laugh of the giddy Annina rang merrily in one of the vast corridors, where she was flirting with the old Greek chasseur Andronicus, but only to drive away ennui in the absence of her cavalier, Giacomo, whom, with his party, the visconte had sent back to Crotona.

"There can be nothing amiss, when Annina laughs so joyously," thought I; "and yet this great Italian villa, so gloomy and so silent, looks like a vast catacomb by the evening light. Olà! Annina!"

"Ecco, signor," cried the damsel, as she danced into the saloon; she evidently expected a stranger, and could not conceal her astonishment on beholding me; but, assuming a prim air, she placed a little finger on her ripe pouting lips, and, with a glance full of archness and mystery, imposed silence.

"My pretty Annina, I am not inclined to flirt just now," said I, kissing her cheek, with jocular gallantry, in proof of my assertion; though, indeed, the girl of Capri was attractive enough to tempt one to be gallant in good earnest. "Where is your lady?"

"My lady, the viscontessa, has gone to confession at the Sylvestrian monastery; old Frà Adriano surfeited himself with choke-priest, and was unable to officiate this evening."

"Tush;" said I, drawing her into a deep alcove, "I mean, la Signora Bianca."

"She is in the garden with the colonel."

"What colonel? Is Luigi here?"

"Signor Claude, you are so impatient!" she replied, slowly, while her black eyes twinkled provokingly, and, raising their arched brows with affected surprise, she added, "Have you never heard of the colonel?"

"Colonel, again! no, no! Who the devil is he?" I muttered impatiently, jerking up my sword-belt, while I ran

in my memory all those I knew who were likely to rival me. "Who the mischief?—it cannot be De Watteville, he is too old; Oswald, he is at Scylla; or Kempt,—Annina, tell me, and you shall give me a kiss in exchange for as many ducats as will buy a magnificent embroidered panno, to set off these jetty locks of yours."

"A girl of Capri would rather give the kiss without the ducats, it would look so like selling the secrets of the signorina, otherwise;" and, while a blush suffused her face, she began to sing, with a coquettish air, "O sweet isle of Capri," &c.

"You shall have both—the kiss now, and the ducats hereafter," said I, saluting the Madonna-like cheek of the pretty Italian, and then it blushed red as the ruby wine of her own rocky isle, while her eyes sparkled like the waves that roll around it in the sunshine.

"Signor," she whispered, "truly I wish you well, but beware of the Colonel Almario, who is daily at the villa, and is even now with my young lady in the garden—in the walk; you know it, shaded by the great laburnums."

"Almario! I never heard such a name before—sounds well enough, though; but how the deuce came he here?"

"On horseback, signor: he rides a beautiful black Barbary horse, which Signora Bianca seems to admire more than your dashing grey."

"The mischief she does! Who introduced this colonel to the family?"

"He is a great friend of Father Petronio, the bishop of Cosenza; and all the world allows that *he* is a saint."

"Your world, Annina, is this little corner of Italy. Well, and the viscontessa met him at a *conversazione* at Nicastro?"

"Exactly so, and won from him a hundred pieces of gold: he lost them with so good a grace, that my lady was quite enchanted with him,—for the more the colonel lost, the more merry he became. San Gennaro! I think he is a sorcerer, who can coin ducats from vine-leaves. He scatters a handful of gold among the servants every time he comes here, so you may easily imagine how much they are devoted to him. He is either Satan or a rich man, and has a way with him that makes all the men his slaves, and the girls his worshippers,—that is, all save myself, signor. And then, such pretty things he says to the signorina, when they play together on their guitars! You would imagine he sat with the Lady Venus herself; but he says the very same things to the old viscontessa, when at cards after supper. O, that Giacomo was re-

turned! I am sure he would not value his ducats or dread his dagger (I know he wears one) a rush. No, he would trim him well with a stout pole, for presuming to make so free at the villa."

"I comprehend the hint. But one word more," said I, in a husky voice, while my heart palpitated with anxiety at this relation. "Have you heard aught of the visconte?"

"Only what you must surely know, that he has fled to the mountains,—to Francatripa, they say, for abducting a nun. *Madonna mia!* what can tempt handsome young men to run off with these pale and melancholy frights, when so many plump and pretty women, with good flesh on their bones, are dying for husbands, both in town and country?"

"Annina, your tongue is again at full gallop. The visconte, then, is not here?"

"No; and yet I could have sworn that I heard him singing a barcarole in the wolf's chamber. God's grace! 'tis a place of gloom and mystery. Poor dear young man! I hope he may come to no harm in these perilous times, when the hills and woods are swarming with Frenchmen and wolves, idle sbirri, starving peasantry, and desperate robbers."

Stepping hastily and cautiously, I passed through the beautiful garden, which extended from the terraces to the southward.

There was now a rival in the way, whose superior military rank and apparent wealth, besides his being Bianca's countryman, made him sufficiently formidable to me: but as I remembered her artlessness, her trembling confusion when we exchanged our rings, and her burst of tenderness when we parted, and how she buried her face in the bosom of Luisa Giamondo, could I believe that she would so very soon prove false? Yet I had heard so much of the volatility of Italian girls, their faithlessness and coquetry, that the words of the waiting-woman fell like molten lead upon my heart.

Before advancing, like a prudent general, I made a complete reconnoissance, and discovered Bianca walking with this redoubtable colonel, conversing and flirting through the folds of her black lace veil. She opened it only at times, when I obtained a glimpse of her pure and happy face,—her bright eyes sparkling, her cheek glowing, and her pretty teeth shining like pearls in the sun, as its rays flashed between the waving branches and pendent golden flowers of the old laburnums. The long, shady walk echoed with their voices, though they conversed in a low tone; and at that moment the sharpening of a handsaw would not have grated on my ears.

painfully as did Bianca's merry laughter at the costs of this confounded colonel.

He was a tall and handsome man, apparently in the prime of life: I had a dim recollection of having seen him before, but when or where I endeavoured in vain to remember. He was dark-complexioned, and so much sunburnt, that I thought he must have seen considerable service. From beneath a scarlet velvet foraging-cap, his dark hair descended in curling ringlets; his nose was aquiline, and a pair of appalling moustaches, black, bushy, and fierce, curled under it. He wore a sky-blue military undress frock, laced with silver, and open at the neck, showing a scarlet waistcoat, which was also richly laced; on his breast glittered a medal and the star of St. Constantine; military boots, with gilt spurs, completed his costume. A gold belt encircled his waist, and sustained a small poniard of exquisite workmanship; his sabre rested on his left arm, and on his right the jewelled hand of Bianca.

Notwithstanding the noble contour of this colonel's features, and a certain lofty dignity in his carriage, there was something so peculiar in his uniform (which I failed to recognise), and in the expression of his eye (which I did not like), that, altogether, I did not consider him a *very* dangerous rival, though he whispered to Bianca in a way that was anything but agreeable to me, and she maintained the conversation with true Italian vivacity and spirit of railery. I was not under the unpleasant necessity of acting eavesdropper long, for, piqued at something he had said, Bianca suddenly quitted his arm, and withdrew a few paces; her eyes sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and her brow, wont to be so pale, now flushed with indignation. The Colonel Almaric sank upon his knee, and held in his her right hand, which tightly grasped a rose she had plucked but a moment before.

"Beautiful Bianca!" I heard him exclaim, while his voice rose and fell with true theatrical cadence, "be not offended if my treacherous tongue has too suddenly revealed the long-cherished sentiments of my heart. O, most gentle signora! how faintly can I express the deep love, the sincere admiration, which at this moment glow within me!"

"I would give ten guineas to have a good long-shanked hunting-whip here just now," I muttered, exasperated by this sudden declaration of passion, at which the poor girl seemed the image of confusion, though its pomposity evidently excited more amusement than pleasure.

"Signor Colonnello, unhand me, if you please. I cannot—

I will not be spoken to thus. "Où! Zacheo! Annina!—here! You have all been bribed! Oh! the treacherous——"

"For the love of all that is gracious! summon no one." (I really think the fellow loved her, so touching was his tone, so earnest his manner.) "Hear me, lady! I am an unfortunate and most unhappy man. I love you passionately——"

"And noisily——"

"Cruel! No man can love a woman more. Will you not vouchsafe me an answer? Bell' idolo! you will not even hear me?"

"No; I will hear nothing while you continue to grasp me thus. Annina! Am I a prisoner in my own house?"

"Give me but this rose; it is a small favour, Signora d'Alfieri; but you have placed it once to your beautiful lips, and their touch has enhanced its value. Bestow it on me, Bianca, as a token that I may yet hope—that, even though withered, I may look upon it and say——"

"Fico! hope you never shall!" exclaimed the spirited girl, as she pulled the rose to pieces, and scattered the leaves upon the upturned face of her admirer, from whom she broke away, and moved toward the villa with all the sweeping hauteur of an offended Juno.

Almario uttered a very audible oath, and sprang forward rudely to seize her; when, stepping from out the shrubbery, I suddenly interposed between them.

"Dearest Claude!" exclaimed Bianca, in a tone of joy, as she passed her arm through mine, while he of the sky-blue frock and star grew pale with anger; he laid his hand on the hilt of his sabre, and, retiring back a few paces, we surveyed each other from top to toe, with all the stern composure of two melodramatic heroes.

"How now, sir?" I exclaimed. "Would you dare to follow the young lady, and continue this ridiculous scene?"

"I am noble—an Italian gentleman, and my purposes are not to be questioned by any foreigner, especially one of subaltern rank," he replied through his clenched teeth. "Signor, learn that I am a colonel of cavalry in the Neapolitan service, and shall not permit this insolent interference to pass unpunished."

"It may be so; but I do not recognize your uniform." His face grew scarlet, and his eyes sparkled with rage at my insinuation. "You must be aware," I continued, "that I have merely done my duty as a gentleman and soldier in rescuing the signora from your impertinent importunity; and it is well for you," I added, considerably ruffled, "that I have

neither a whip nor cane wherewith to chastise you as you deserve."

"And well it is for you likewise, signor. By Heavens! were such an indignity as a blow put upon me, I would destroy you on the spot; and if you escaped that vengeance which my hand must shortly take for this insulting threat, a thousand stilettoes would be on your track! Not in the caverns of Scylla, or the wilds of La Sylva—not amid all the guards and gates of Malta and Messina, would you be safe from my revenge."

"O signori!" implored the trembling Bianca.

"Sir, I have very great doubts that you are an officer, but none that you are both a knave and fool, to rant in this manner," I replied with provoking coolness, while pressing the arm of the agitated girl to my side. "I comprehend nothing about those thousand knives of which you speak so pompously, but here is my card, Signor Colonello: I will be at the villa until near noon to-morrow, and any communication with which you honour me will reach me there. I am not to be terrified by the blustering of any man; therefore, sir, it is quite unnecessary 'to get up in your stirrups' when addressing me."

"Good!" said he haughtily; "I have not my card-case with me, but I can understand this, signor. By noon to-morrow, I must be on the march to join the chiefs of the Masse, in the Upper Province."

"Your regiment is, then, in the neighbourhood?"

"My regiment!" he stammered, while again the flush crossed his olive cheek and haughty brow. "Yes, yes—undoubtedly; and one it is that will be heard of ere long. Signor, you have treated me somewhat cavalierly, which, considering the difference of our rank and years, I deem considerable presumption on your part; but you British behave so to all foreigners. Ha! that I should colour at the taunts of a mere boy—I, who have heard more bullets whistle in a week than he has done since he first girt on a sword! Behold this medal! on the ramparts of Andria I tore it from the breast of the traitorous count of Ruvo, whose savage followers, giving all to fire and sword, made an earthly hell of beautiful Apulia. Ha! boy, you never witnessed such a leaguer as that."

He jerked his sabre under his arm, bowed profoundly to Bianca, and was swaggering haughtily away, when I followed him.

"Sir, then you will not grant me a meeting?" He wheeled sharply round, and muttered, in a fierce and rapid whisper,

"When a horn sounds over the lawn this evening, I will be

awaiting you on the road which leads to the ruined hospital of the Maltese knights. Fail not to come, as a recourse to arms can alone decide now, whether you or I shall possess this girl and her ducats."

"Enough!" said I, scornfully, and we separated.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HORN SOUNDS.

I LED Bianca into the villa, where she flung herself upon a sofa, and, overcome with excitement, gave way to a passion of tears. I very naturally seated myself close by, to console and pacify her.

"Dear Bianca, this is quite foolish, now!" said I, putting an arm gently round her; "why are you weeping?"

"This colonel—this Almario——"

"Upon my honour! Bianca, I shall send expressly to the camp for Bob Brown, my groom, to horsewhip him, for making you weep thus. He is unworthy my own——"

"O no, no!" she exclaimed, weeping very bitterly; "I do not wish Signor Bob Brown to be killed on my account. But promise me, dear Claude, that you will never seek or meet him in a hostile manner," she added, looking up, and smiling so imploringly, that I quite forgot what I meant to say, and so kissed her, in my confusion.

"Claude," she continued, taking both my hands in hers, and looking me full in the face with her clear and brilliant eyes,—“Claude, promise me that you never will. Ah! my heart would break—it would—it would, indeed, if blood were shed on my account.”

"Well, then, dear one! I will never seek the presence of the colonel. But the service, you must be aware—my character—O, the devil!—let him beware how he summons me!"

"Swear it on this Agnus-dei!" said she, taking a little bag of perfumed satin from her bosom. To please her, I kissed the amulet which reposed in so adorable a place, and the innocent girl was satisfied.

"When we are married, I will cure her of all this nonsense," I thought, and ratified the treaty of peace on her flushed and dimpled cheek.

"And now, caro," said she in a soft, low voice, "I have a

great secret to intrust you with. Of course you know all about poor Luigi's wild adventure?"

"My bones ache at the recollection thereof; I narrowly escaped hanging, shooting, and drowning, all of which were proposed in turns by a little hunchbacked fellow, a follower of Francatipa, who chose to make himself very active on the occasion. And do you know, Bianca, that I was immured in the thieves' cage, at the end of the town prison; a good joke, is it not?"

"I heard it all from Annina, whose last love-letter from Giacomo (written, of course, by an itinerant scrivano) was filled with a history of the affair. O, the madness of my dear and foolish sister. How bitterly I wept for and deplored it! Believe me, Claude, had an Italian cavalier been put into that horrid cage, his soldiers would have set the town on fire; but you British! oh, you take some things very quietly. Yesterday, a mounted sbirro brought me a letter from my sweet little friend Luisa Gismondo, who is with her father in the camp at Cassano. O, what dreadful things she tells me of! And Massena, that very bad Italian, he is gathering together an army, who boast that they will soon clear Calabria of the British."

"But where is Luigi now?"

"Just behind you, signor, and most happy to congratulate you on your promotion. I saw it in the *Messina Gazette*," said the visconte, coming from the recess of a window, where, unseen, he had been a smiling spectator. Grasping my hand, he continued, "How I rejoice that you escaped from the villainous Crotonians. On my honour! Dundas, nothing but fear for my poor Francesca restrained me from putting back to save or avenge you; and we all imagined those base paesani would have respected your uniform and character."

"No more apologies; but say, how does the Signora Francesca?"

"Indifferently, indeed. She bemoans her degraded situation incessantly (here Bianca reclined her head on my epaulette, and sobbed audibly). Torn from her convent, to which she dare return no more, she is still a nun; and, until her vows are dispensed with at Rome, I cannot make her my wife. I now see that her position is deplorable, and heartily wish that I had been less rash: but what will not a wild spirit dare, when love leads, and the Fend prompts? I have, perhaps, blighted her prospects for ever, and placed myself in most deadly jeopardy; every hour increases our peril! The bishop of Cosenza (so famous for his pretended piety)

has taken up the matter hotly, and placed us under the ban of the church; while, armed with warrants, procured from the Grand Criminal Court at Palermo, his sbirri, aided by those of that old blockhead the barone di Bivona (who owes me a thousand sequins, lost at *faro*), are searching all Lower Calabria for us; I expect them here every hour. King Ferdinand, anxious to flatter our priesthood and please his bigoted subjects, has declared himself my enemy, and we dare not venture to Sicily, even could we reach its shores; the commissaries of the townships are everywhere on the alert, and we could never, unless escorted by some armed followers, embark on the Calabrian seas.

"To pass into the Upper Province would only redouble the danger; Francesca would become the prey of the bishop, or the brutal Massena, who would, undoubtedly, order me to be shot. Ha! the French have not forgotten certain exploits of mine, when I first unsheathed my sword beneath the walls of Altamura, on that great day, when, on the eve of battle, Ruffe performed high mass before the whole Calabrian line.

"I never dreamt that the toils of my adversaries would close so tightly round me! But the villa is well provided with lurking-holes, and I have little doubt of being able to baffle completely any band that may come in pursuit of us here. Were my old sbirri under its roof-tree—were Benedetto del Castagno, Marco of Castelfermo, and my trusty Giacomo by my side, I would yet show them that the visconte of Santugo was not to be hunted like a wild boar. No, by the gods! I would make good the house against the bishop's rascals, though backed by the papal guard. San Gennaro! rather than surrender, I would blow it into the air, and flying to the Grecian isles, there hoist the red banner of piracy, as many a reckless Italian noble has done before." His eyes glared, as black eyes only do; he laughed bitterly, showing his white teeth beneath the sable moustache, and he panted, rather than breathed, as he continued, "Our king, Monsignore Macheroni, should remember the feeble tenure on which he holds his tottering throne, and be wary of raising enemies in this last stronghold of Italian independence. Palermo will not always have a British fleet to protect its walls from the cannon of France; withdraw your frigates from the straits of the *Faro*, your red coats from the ramparts of Messina, Milazzo, and Syracuse, and the power and throne of the lazzaroni king will fall prone to the earth, like a house of cards!"

"Hush! dearest Luigi," exclaimed his timid and terrified

cousin, when a pause in this long tirade permitted her to speak. "This is all treason, every word; and you know not who may be within hearing."

"If there are any within hearing who would prove false to the race of Santugo, I would crop their ears, like base Jacobins, and then bore their tongues with a hot bodkin, that they may the more glibly tell their story at Palermo. *Corpo di Baccho!* I defy and scorn them all!" and snatching a large cup of wine from a marble cooler, he drained it to the bottom; then casting himself upon an ottoman, he tossed the cup to the other end of the apartment with such force, that it dashed to pieces a rich Etruscan vase.

"Dundas, my good friend," he continued, "hot and high words are but a poor welcome to you, after coming so far out of your way to visit us; yet I am so exasperated about this matter—this elopement with my cousin! Queen Caroline, she, too, has become an enemy. I had the ill fortune to please her eye once, and she could forgive me for any scrape in which a woman is not concerned; you comprehend? In fact, I was quite a rival to Master Acton—your half-countryman—the *ci-devant* apothecary, whom all the world knows about."

"O Luigi, Luigi!" exclaimed Bianca.

"Tush! I tell you, Bianca, that once, when I was waiting on the king—*per Baccho!* what am I going to say?"—he paused and coloured. At that moment the blast of a horn came, in varying cadence, on the evening breeze; I started at the expected signal.

"Où! what may that portend?" said the visconte, whom it relieved from his embarrassment. "I shall be glad to learn who dares to sound a horn within the bounds of my jurisdiction?" he added, taking up his sword.

"I will accompany you."

"Good; then let us go!"

Glad to have a decent pretext for quitting her presence, I pressed Bianca's hand to my lips with trembling anxiety, while there stole over me a dismal foreboding that we might meet no more. My promise to her was forgotten; could I keep it? Impossible!

"Luigi, beware of a quarrel; and, dear Claude, for the love of Heaven! curb his rashness. I can depend on you," said she, as we hurried down the staircase; and her words sank deeply into my heart. Too well I knew the deadly mission on which we were bound; and the shrill mountain

horn poured another warning blast, which, as it seemed more faint and distant, made us quicken our steps. The visconte's horses stood in their stalls, saddled and bridled ready for any emergency; and, summoning Zacheo Ardronicus to bring forth a couple of nags, we mounted, and, accompanied by him, galloped in the direction of the signal, with the purport of which I acquainted my friend, as we rode on.

"*Caspetto!*" he exclaimed; "then this quarrel is mine. I cannot permit you to jeopard life or limb for any member of my family, of whose honour, I, as chief and head, am the defender and guardian. I will in person meet this colonel, of whom more has been said at the villa than I cared to listen to. He is one of my mother's gambling friends, picked up at that select resort, Father Petronio's palace; and is, perhaps, some barefaced charlatan, who assumes the name of *Almario* and the rank of colonel."

"But there are many officers of the *Masse* and other irregular corps, whose uniforms are so motley and fanciful, and whose names are not borne on any authorized list, that it is impossible to say what he is."

"True; but time shall prove all; and I——"

"*Santugo!* it was to me, and with me alone, that defiance was exchanged; I cannot permit another to fight in my quarrel."

"But the quarrel is my pretty *Bianca's*, and I am her only kinsman."

"And I her betrothed husband: behold this ring!"

"*Buono!* but I am an unfortunate dog, who would more willingly be shot to-night than live longer."

"And leave *Francesca* alone—alone in her misery and helplessness?"

"O *Madonna!*—Yet I will meet the colonel."

"On my honour you shall *not*," I continued, with equal pertinacity. "I must fight or horsewhip him. But if I am winged, or knocked on the head, you can take up my ground, and parade him in turn.—By the bye, have you not been somewhat rash in venturing forth with me this evening before dusk, when so many enemies are hovering round and ready to pounce on you?"

"I am aware of it; but you have need of a friend; and when I heard this horn blown within the boundaries of my estate, the thought that the base banditti, the ungrateful shepherds, or the carbonari, presuming on my outlawry, were poaching or plundering under the very eaves of the villa, aroused my anger——"

"Eccellenza," said Zacheo, the chasseur, riding up with alarm in his countenance, "a party of horsemen are now entering the Valley of Amato."

"Armed, too," I added, as, following the eye of the venerable retainer, I saw about thirty mounted men riding, three deep, at an easy pace across the broad and level valley, through which the river wound like a gilded snake; "well horsed and armed. See how their appointments flash in the sun!"

"They are about a cannon-shot distant," replied the visconte; "and should they prove to be authorities from Cosenza, we can still baffle them, even if they come up with us."

"Three to thirty?" said I, inquiringly.

"And what of that? We have good Calabrian cattle under us; the free mountains, the deep rivers, the dense forests, and a bright moonlight night before us,—all glorious for a flying skirmish; and we may empty a dozen of their saddles yet before the stars go down."

"And what if they search the villa?"

"I trust to Madonna that the same secret place in the round tower which saved my ancestor from the followers of Carlo of Anjou, will avail my Francesca now,—save by terror or treachery, it cannot be discovered. I hope, Master Zacheo, that the contents of the holsters are in service order?"

"Most carefully flinted and loaded, excellency," replied the Greek from the rear.

"But these may be neither the sbirri of the bishop nor his meddling friend the barone; and, as they do not pursue a way leading either to the villa or to us, let us avoid them, in God's name! We have business enough of our own to settle before the night closes."

At a hand-gallop we passed the redoubts, garrisoned by part of the regiment De Watteville, and which they had erected on the day of our disembarkation. On the turf bastions the sentries were pacing briskly to and fro; and as we left the fort behind, the evening gun was fired, its echoes rolling along the hills with a thousand reverberations, and dying away in the distance. The gaudy union descended slowly from the flag-staff; while the fifes playing, and the drums beating, in that peculiar time which is called "the sunset, or evening retreat," awoke the gentler responses of the woods and winding shore, when the hollow boom of the cannon had pealed away on the passing wind; it was

"Lochabar no more," a plaintive northern air, often played by our bands when the sun is setting, announcing that another day has rolled into eternity.

Its slow-measured beat, and melancholy notes, are among the domestic, or home-sounds, of the barrack-square; then the captain of the day, sulky at being obliged to leave his wine, lounges forth with a cigar in his mouth, and leaves the mess-room, to parade the inlying piquet, who are mustered in their dark great-coats by the indefatigable serjeant-major; the gates are shut, the drawbridges lowered, and the canteen cleared of its noisiest revellers; the last flush of the sun has died away over the distant hill, and a stillness settles over the whole community, only broken by a laugh now and then from the mess, or by the tread of feet and clash of arms, as the sentinels are relieved at their posts.

I listened sadly as the music faded away in the distance; and, truly, my deadly mission began to press more heavily upon me than before. Never again might I hear those well-known sounds, and when the same drums were beating the merry *régail* and the lark was soaring aloft to greet the rising sun, where might I be? I strove to divert the current of my thoughts, and not to think of it; but the same obstinate and gloomy idea ever thrust itself before me. The affection of Bianca d'Alfieri, my recent promotion, and the chances of still further advancement, now made life seem of some value. I never experienced these depressing thoughts on the eve of a battle, or assault; but the cold-blooded and deliberate preparations for a duel give one time to *reflect*, and reflection may damp the courage of a man who otherwise would hear, without wincing, a salvo of cannon-balls whistling about his ears.

I thought of my old familiar friends at the regiment, who were, doubtless, at that moment, enjoying their iced Sicilian wines, with the mess-room windows open, while our matchless band played to the ladies and cavaliers promenading on the Marina; and I wished myself amongst them. I thought of my home—my happy boyhood's home—where the Eak flowing down from the heath-clad hills, sweeps onward to the ocean, and I wished the colonel where Empedocles went. But enough of this, or the reader will be supposing I felt inclined to "show the white feather."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DUEL AND A DISCOVERY.

ALL those depressing thoughts evaporated the moment I obtained a glimpse of my adversary ; he was leaning against a tree, smoking a cigar, and stroking the nose of his boasted black horse, whose bridle reins were thrown negligently over his arm. Remembering only his taunts and defiance, his presumption and rivalry, I was ready to rush into hostilities with him, and wage life against life.

He awaited us near the ruinous preceptory house of the Maltese knights, through whose ivy-clad arches, rent walls, and windows choked up with grass, the last flush of sunset was poured in strong columns of light ; around us flourished gigantic green laurels, and many a glittering ilex, which completely screened us from the eyes of any stray passenger, and from the sentinels on Sir Louis de Watteville's field-work.

" I trust, sir," said I, saluting him, " that we have not detained you long ?"

" Not very," was the cold reply ; " but we must be quick, or this affair will scarcely be settled before dusk."

" You have no friend with you ?"

" None, save my usual weapons ; but *you* have come pretty well attended. Two gentlemen well horsed and armed to the teeth !"

" His excellency the grand bailiff, and one of his servants," said I.

" My lord the visconte rarely rides abroad at present, and I think his presence here is somewhat unwise," said Almario, bowing to Santugo, who was piqued at the observation, and, nodding coldly, replied,—

" I cannot permit your coming to blows with this officer, in the quarrel of my cousin. By the bye, to what branch of the service do you belong ?—the cavalry ?"

" The irregular troops of the Masse," replied he, with a sark frown.

Luigi bowed and said, " I am the guardian, the only protector and defender of Bianca d'Alfieri ; and I claim this quarrel as mine."

" I never meant to insult the Signora Bianca, or quarrel with her family—nothing would be further from my thoughts ;

but if my respectful declaration of a sincere passion offended, I am most heartily sorry, and will make any amends to which an Italian gentleman may stoop without dishonour."

Luigi bowed again, in reply to this apology, and reined his horse back a few paces.

"But with *you*, Signor Capitano," continued the colonel, addressing me, "the quarrel is too serious to be satisfied so easily. We have mutually defied each other, and my honour demands redress. Am I to understand that you are the challenger, and that, by receiving your card, it is at your request I am here?"

"Assuredly, sir!" I answered haughtily.

"Good!" said he, throwing his snaffle-rein over the branch of a tree; "then with me lies the choice of weapons. Is it not so, visconte?"

Santugo merely bowed again, but with evident hesitation; and, dismounting, we gave our horses to Andronicus, who immediately drew off a little way.

By so frankly avowing myself challenger, I had fallen into a regular scrape; an Italian would, perhaps, have prevaricated; yet I could hardly believe that the colonel would make so cowardly a choice as to select the national weapon—the poniard. But it was so; after rolling his cloak round the left arm, with the utmost care and deliberation, he drew off his gloves, turned up his right sleeve, to leave the hand and wrist perfectly free; buttoned his light blue military frock up to the throat, threw aside his sabre, and offered me a pair of poniards, saying, briefly, "Choose."

They were daggers of Campo-forte, with elaborately-carved ivory hilts, and blades about nine inches long, triangular, and fluted on two sides, like bayonets.

"Colonel," said I, "although in acknowledging myself challenger, I may have placed at your disposal the choice of weapons, if you suppose that a British officer will condescend to fight with knives or poniards like a drunken lassarone, a hired bravo, or any brawling coward of Naples, you labour under an unhappy mistake. I have pistols in my holsters, and with these will meet you on equal terms."

"By heaven! you greatly over-rate my good nature, if you imagine I will engage you with any weapons save those of my own choosing. Any other Neapolitan would have despatched this business, by bestowing three carlini on some hold lad of the knife to tickle your ribs in the dark."

"Your language is not that of an officer."

"We fight with poniards, or not at all!"

"Must this be?" I asked Santuzo.

"F mortal duels are seldom fought in Italy; secretly or openly, the knife generally ends all disputes," replied the visconte; "but the challenged usually has the choice of weapons in all countries. Castelermo, a great authority in these matters, has—but I am astonished that Colonel Almario, as a soldier and a gentleman, should resort to this vulgar and antiquated mode of settling disputes."

My friend seemed under considerable anxiety on finding that I had fallen into such a dilemma—about to fight with a murderous weapon in the management of which I was totally unskilled.

"Captain Dundas, you had better make up your mind," said Almario, with a sneering aspect; "or our meeting may be ended in the dark, like those of the bravoes you so greatly despise."

"Sir!" I replied sternly, "I am not ashamed to acknowledge my ignorance of the management of this pig-butcher's weapon, and so—"

"So decline the contest?"

"No!—far from it; but I will meet you with my sabre or pistols."

"I will accept of neither,—being determined to slay you; so if you stand not on the defensive, I will rush on, and end the matter by a single blow."

This threat put an end to all further negotiation, and I felt the devil stirred up within me.

"For God's sake be wary!" whispered the visconte, as Zacheo bound a horse-cloak round my left arm; "keep the guard well up, to protect your face and breast, and watch his eyes with the acuteness of a lynx."

"Remember this ring," I muttered hurriedly (assassination now seemed certain); "it is our poor Bianca's—and, if anything happens—you understand me?"

"No, no—not I—if aught untoward happens, by the blood of San Gennaro! the colonel shall cross his blade with mine;" and he left me.

Standing now about twelve yards distant from my enemy, I felt not unlike a recruit when a loaded firelock is first placed in his hands; I knew not what position to assume, and was only restrained from protesting against the combat by dread of the triumph such a course would afford to Almario. He saw my confusion; his dark eyes glittered with malice and joy, while my heart burned only with hatred and rage at the prospect of becoming a victim to an uncompromising gue-

rilla, who deemed himself sure of easy victory over my inexperience.

With his hat drawn over his eyes, and his arms folded on his breast, Santiago stood apart, regarding us with a flushed cheek, and a stern, yet troubled eye; while Andronicus had placed his crucifix against a tree, and was praying on his knees before it for my success, with all the energy and devotion of a monk of La Trappe.

The position I assumed, with my hands clenched, my left foot advanced, and my head well thrown back, was rather that of a boxer, than of a combatant in such a contest as that in which I figured. My antagonist bent forward on his left instep, keeping the arm muffled with his cloak before him as a buckler, while the right hand grasped the upraised poniard, ready to plunge it, to the hilt, in the first unprotected place.

After regarding me for a moment with eyes to which bitter animosity lent unusual vivacity, the colonel rushed upon me like a tiger.

More by chance than skill, I received the blade of the descending poniard in the thick folds of Zacheo's horse-cloak, and—contrary to all rule—before he could withdraw it, dealt him a tremendous blow under the left ear, causing his rattling jaws to clatter like a pair of castanets, when, as if struck by lightning, he measured his length on the turf. Though given in a moment of confusion, it was a regular knock-down blow, which would have charmed the English gentlemen of the fancy; but signor the Colonel Almario was quite unprepared for such a mode of fighting, and seemed in no way delighted with it. He lay for a moment motionless, as if dead.

"Glorious!" exclaimed Santiago, while I took the poniard from the relaxed hand of my adversary, whose long curly ringlets and moustaches fell off, one by one (as we raised him up), and revealed the shaven chin, close-shorn hair, and firm, swart features of one well known to us.

"Now, by all the imps of Etna!" exclaimed Santiago, in a transport of fury and surprise, letting him fall heavily on the turf, "tis the brigand—Francatipa!"

"*Al vostro commando* (at your service)"—replied that personage, bowing with perfect nonchalance.

"Rascal! and you presumed to speak of love to Bianca of Santiago? *Corpo di Baccho!* I am half inclined to sabre him where he lies, to teach him the respect he owes to noble ladies!"

"Aye, do, your excellency," cried Andronicus; "slay him—the impostor! his head is worth its weight in ducats; crush him like a torpedo—gash him across the throat like a lynx! Where, cattivo! have I left my knife? Only think, signor—his villains the other night burned the village of Amato—plundered the shrine of the Virgin, whose milk is preserved there in a bottle. O, horror! he broke off the neck and drank the contents!"

"Silence, dolt!" exclaimed Francatripa. "You have discovered me, gentlemen," continued the prostrate robber, whose throat I still grasped; "and what mean you to do now? I am in your power, and there is not a syndic or commandant in the Calabrias but would—withstanding that I stand so high in the queen's favour—give a thousand pieces of gold for my head. However, as it is of more use to me, they shall not have it for ten times that number. Maladetto! how it rings after that crackjaw! Do you mean to make me prisoner?"

"No, Francatripa," replied the generous Santugo, in a voice which, from being sternly slow, became soft and kind; "I am one of the Alfieri—thou knowest me, and knowest too well I would scorn the deed; savage and bloody though all men term you, I have heard many a good and generous trait of your character; and the uncompromising hostility you have ever evinced to France, your high courage, and incorruptible patriotism, have gained my admiration and esteem; although at heart I abhorred the cruelties perpetrated by your people on our countrymen—defending our towns gallantly from Regnier to-day, and pillaging them ruthlessly to-morrow."

The brigand, who expected to be overwhelmed with reproaches and scorn, was confounded by this unexpected address; and he became still more so when I assisted him to rise, and restored his poniard, saying,—

"Let us be friends, signor. I have not forgotten how generously you entertained the cavaliere di Castelermo and myself last night; protecting us from the insolence of your band, and the petulance of their lieutenant. Receive your poniard, and learn to make a better use of it; or rather, not to use it at all. I esteem you as a brave man, though an erring one, and trust that the blow I gave you will not occasion you further inconvenience."

"Francatripa," added Santugo, striking him familiarly on the shoulder, "seek another path than that which leads through the prison-gate to the scaffold. Carolina has sent to

you, though but a mountain-rotter, the same badge of knight-hood with which she adorns the noblest breasts in Naples—the star of St. Constantine. Learn to deserve it, and to wear it with honour. Grow wise in time; become honest as you are brave; lead your bold followers against the legions of France, instead of the poor carbonari of our hills, and the peaceful vine-traders of our valleys. Fight only for Italy and honour, and, *corpo di Baccho!* you will live in history and in song, like Marco Sciarra—*re della campagna*—and lord of the wilderness!”

The robber seemed deeply affected by our frankness.

“Monsignore visconte and signor capitano,” said he, saluting us gracefully, and retiring a pace; “I am not the hardened villain the evil tongues of slanderers would make me. God and his blessed mother, who read our hearts, know that I have been by stern necessity compelled to witness—ay, and to participate in—many a deed of blood and horror, from which my soul shrank with disgust. Yet there was a time, to which I look back through the long, dark vista of many a sinful year” (he spoke slowly and with sighs) “a time when, in youth and innocence, I sat by my mother’s knee in our little cot among the wilds of *La Sylva*, and when she sang to me of the exploits of Sciarra the glorious, Battimello the treacherous, and Mangone the terrible. Ah! how little did I then dream of following so closely in their footsteps—of being what I have since become! Deeply these songs sank in my heart, and more fondly were they remembered than the *Ave Maria* and hymn to the little child Jesus, which the same dear lips taught me to chant every night before the humble shrine in our cottage. I am not a cold-blooded and deliberate rascal. No; a combination of circumstances brought me to the unenviable position in which I now stand, roused all the evil passions of my breast, and made me an outcast and an enemy to mankind. My wife was false—her seducer was noble—my knife was sharp as my vengeance—that is my history. The barone of Castelguelfo was my evil genius; but he did not die. I fled to poverty and despair—thence to crime. How easy is the transition! There was a time—but, *vial ’tis past*; let me recur to it no more, but forget it; as Francatipa the gentleman is forgotten in Francatipa the capobandito.

“Remember, excellency, that I sought not the villa d’Alfieri uninvited; I went there on the pressing invitation of the viscontessa, to whom, in this disguise, I was introduced by the bishop of Cosenza, of whom—but enough! The

recollection of what I have been, leads me to love that society in which I once moved as an equal, but from whose magic circle I am now proscribed, as if the mark of Cain were upon me. Between us, crime has raised up a mighty barrier, which neither this honoured badge, the gift of a queen, nor that commission (at which all men laugh as a burlesque, when bestowed on me) can level. And truly, though proud of my knightly star, I know too well that it shines with diminished lustre on the breast of a poor Calabrian outlaw."

His voice faltered, and his brow clouded still more; he took his horse by the bridle, and yet paused, as if he had something more to say.

"My lord, beware of our mutual enemy, the Baron Gueffo. My people lately intercepted a letter from him to the Cavaliere Belcastro, concerning some Buonapartist plot they were hatching. He has been enrolling an unusual number of sbirri, and reports are current that he intends to raise the standard of Joseph on this side of the Calabrian lines. And, my lord, let the excellent lady, your mother, be more wary in future, and avoid inviting to her own mansion those gamesters whom she meets at the palace of the bishop. Would to heaven I had never beheld the Signorina Bianca!—Pardon me, visconte.—Her beauty and innocence have awakened in my breast old feelings and long-forgotten sentiments of honour and love, which all the sins and toils of four-and-twenty years—wretched years of wandering and misery—have not been able to obliterate from the memory of the hapless, the crime-burdened, and heart-broken robber of Calabria!"

He turned aside for a moment, to conceal the passing emotion, which caused every muscle and feature of his handsome face to quiver perceptibly,

"Gentlemen," said he, recovering, "you imagined I was completely at your mercy, yet you behaved with a noble generosity, which I shall never forget. You might have proposed to slay me at that instant" (he darted a terrible glance at Andronicus), "or to deliver me up to the nearest podestà; you betrayed no intention of doing either, but, had you made the attempt, behold my prevention!"

He placed to his lips a bugle of black buffalo horn, and blew a shrill signal, which made hill and valley, wood and shore, now growing dark and grim in the twilight, re-echo to the sound. It acted like the whistle of Black Roderick in the wilderness. His followers, to the number of twice five hundred men, sprang up from their concealment among the

underwood, the dark green laurels, the long wavy grass, the rocks, and the crumbling ruins, and crowded around us, a startling swarm of black-browed and ruffian-like fellows, all clad in the gay brigand's garb, and well armed with the Calabrian rifle, pouch, and powder-horn, some with the spoil of the unhappy Frenchmen massacred at La Sylva and the villa of Sanveria, but most of them with good British buff belts, muskets, bayonets, and cartridge-boxes, which on our landing we had issued, perhaps rather too indiscriminately, to the peasantry.

My friend and I confronted this appalling array with firmness, but old Zacheo grew pale as death; his legs tottered under him, and he sank humbly on his knees, while the memory of the fatal words by which he had urged us to despatch Francatipa, caused a cold perspiration to come over him.

"Signori, behold my followers, those free foresters of St. Eufemio, whose fame is so terrible through all the Neapolitan territories. During our whole interview they have been around us, so you were all more in my power than I could be in yours. Do me the honour to keep the poniards for my sake, and if ever you are assaulted by a Calabrian outlaw, show him my cipher on the pommel, and his arm will be powerless against you, and the passage free. Yes! fallen though he is, the name of Francatipa finds an echo in every Italian heart, and there is something glorious in that!"

He vaulted gracefully into his saddle, and assuming all his former loftiness of manner, made a signal to his band, who immediately moved off at a running trot towards the forest, led by my old acquaintance, the crookback, who now very ignobly bestrode a paunchy mule.

"Buona notte, monsignore visconte; Capitano, *santa notte!*" cried the gallant robber, waving his cap, and putting spurs to his horse.

"A long good-bye to Francatipa, and all his company," I replied, significantly, as he rode away at full gallop; but Luigi, who had also resumed his hauteur, merely gave him a cold bow, and muttered to me—

"Pshaw I hate these sentimental ruffians. Yet he is a famous fellow."

I preserved one of the brigand's poniards, as a memorial of that strange encounter, but my haughtier friend gave the other as a gift to his servant, who immediately placed it in his leathern girdle. After watching the disappearance of the

brigands, as they retired by one of those gloomy gorges through which the Calabrian roads generally wind, we prepared to return to the villa, having now been absent two hours, as we remembered how great would be the anxiety of the timid Bianca for our safety.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ARRIVAL OF THE PHILISTINES.

It was now night, and the stars were shining in the dark blue sky; the lights from the tents and huts within the field-work, sparkled amid the deep gloom which involved the lower parts of the shore, and shed red streaks of uncertain radiance on the black heaving waters of the bay. The moon, like a gigantic silver shield, began slowly to show its white disk in the direction of the Lipari Isles, and to throw a brightening ray of pallid lustre from the level horizon to the shingly beach of St. Eufemio.

"Excellency," said Andronicus, cantering up to us, "there are armed horsemen crossing the Amato, and riding straight upon our path. They may be Castelguelfo's men; his people are not with the Masse. Shall we meet them, or turn aside?"

"The former, of course," replied the imprudent visconte; "why, am I to turn aside my horse every time a mounted man appears on the road? Let us once be past yonder post, and we are safe within the bounds of my own territory."

The Greek made no reply, but reined in his horse, and fell into our rear again; yet I perceived him unbuttoning the flaps of his holsters. Our path lay along the skirts of the forest, and we rode unseen under the deep shadow it cast across the path, but the bright moon revealed the dark outline of several horsemen, posted at a spot where the road crossed the river, which glittered like a broad belt of silver in the dancing beams, when its current, emerging from the depths of the wood, swept through the illumined plain. The strangers were thirteen in number, and all well armed with pikes and carbines, except one, who, by his drawn sabre and the plume in his hat, appeared to be an officer. By their equipment, we knew them to be a party of the Loyal Calabrese

Masse, and we paused to reconnoitre them, before pushing our horses across the stream.

"Who are you that bar our way in this manner?" demanded Santugo.

"The bearers of a message to his excellency the visconte, who, I presume, now addresses me," was the reply.

"A troublesome one, if it requires thirteen men to deliver it. Who sends it?"

"The most reverend father in God, the lord bishop of Cosenza, president of the grand criminal court at Palermo," was the formal reply. "Resistance is madness. Surrender your sword, monsignore."

"To whom?" asked Santugo, with fierce surprise.

"The barone di Bivona."

"The hereditary bailiff surrender to a mere barone of his province! Never, by heaven!" exclaimed the visconte, drawing the sword which, as an officer of the free corps, he wore continually. "Follow me, Claude! Zacheo, forward and at them. I will not be captured tamely within the bounds of my own jurisdiction. On! and cut a passage through them."

Although not quite so rash and hot-blooded as my Italian friend, I had no time for reflection; but, following his example, drew my sabre, and, despising the Masse as all our army did, we dashed through the Amato, splashing the sparkling water on every side, while a volley from twelve carbines whistled about our ears. I lost an epaulette by one shot, and had my right cheek grazed by another, but luckily no harm was done, and, charging three abreast, we fell upon them pell-mell. I contented myself with acting strictly on the defensive, and used my sabre so expertly in guarding my head, limbs, and body, that I was invulnerable; but Santugo, whose inherent Italian ferocity now burst forth without control, laid open the cheek of one poor wretch, threw a second from his horse with a thrust, and, dealing a sweeping back-stroke at them all, pushed forward at full speed.

Andronicus, who was armed with a heavy *couteau-de-chasse*, which his sire had wielded in the wars of the gallant conte di Leyda, after laying about him like his namesake at Tyre, followed his master's example, which I, too, was not slow in imitating.

The skirmish was one which I did not in the least relish, being aware that I stood an excellent chance of receiving a shot or a pike-thrust, without gaining an atom of honour; and that a severe reprimand, perhaps a court-martial, would be the consequence, if our general learned that I was prowling

about like a wandering knight, and brawling with the constituted authorities, when I should have been riding post-haste with the papers which Macleod so carefully prepared for his perusal—and for which our ambassador at Palermo was no doubt waiting with the utmost impatience.

The provincial horses are famous for their strength and speed, and Santugo's cattle carried us across the country at a tremendous pace. We were closely followed by the exasperated troopers of the Masse, who now and then fired a shot after us, by way of giving us a relish to our ride.

"Which way, visconte?" cried I.

"To the villa; it is our safest—our only halting-place. The mountains are too far off."

"By Jupiter! I feel half inclined to turn and show fight, if they continue to fire at us thus."

"Would to heaven and San Ugo, that Giacomo and any four of my old shirri were here!" exclaimed the visconte, as he fired his pistols at random. The last shot *told* (as we say) effectually. A cry was heard; I looked back for a moment, and saw by the moonlight a man rolling in agony on the road, while his horse was rushing to the rear at full gallop.

"It is no sinecure being on the staff here, truly," thought I, as we pulled up in the quadrangle of the villa, after having distanced our pursuers by two miles.

The gruff clamour of male voices swearing in most guttural Neapolitan, the shrill cries of women, and the confusion reigning within the mansion, announced to my friend that the enemies of his peace had penetrated to the very centre of his household, armed equally with carnal and legal weapons, warrants of the church and state, and assisted by the followers of Bivona, who wore the red cockade of the Masse.

"Francesca is lost, and for me nothing now remains but to die! Oh! my cousin—my love—my wife, I alone am guilty!" exclaimed Santugo in a piercing voice, as he leaped from his horse, drew his sword, and rushed up the marble staircase towards the apartment where the greatest uproar seemed to reign.

The chamber which had concealed the fugitive from the field of Benevento, in the days of Charles of Anjou, had not availed his descendant now. Dragged forth from the vault below the round tower, we beheld the unhappy Francesca, almost inanimate from terror, in the hands of two rough-looking fellows who wore the bishop's livery—a kind of monkish garb, with which their black cross-belts and cartridge-boxes, and flaming scarlet cockades, but ill accorded.

Overcome with shame and horror, the poor girl drooped like a crushed flower in their rude grasp.

Never was I so much struck with her resemblance to Bianca. She had the same placid brow, the same clear and brilliant eyes, the same exquisitely gentle expression and classic contour of face, which had gained these lovely sisters the soubriquet of the three Italian Grades. But now, alas! her features wore the hue of death, and appeared yet more ashy when contrasted with the heavy masses of black curls which fell in disorder over her shoulders; her teeth were set, and her eyes glared with an unnatural lustre.

With all the tenacious energy of one who struggles for life, she clung to the satin skirt of the viscontessa, whose right hand yet grasped a suit of cards, whilst her left was filled with counters. The old lady was quite paralyzed.

On the other side, clung Bianca, almost sinking with terror, and surveying, with restless and tearful eyes, the fierce group of armed men who thronged the apartment.

"Heaven!—O, heaven!" exclaimed Francesca, in piercing accents; "save me, dearest signora—my aunt—my second mother—save me! Let me not be torn from my father's house by these frightful men! O misery! what have I done? O for my father's arm to shield me now! But he died in Apulia. Luigi, Luigi, save me, or I am lost to you for ever! Luigi, anima mia!"

What a voice she had! Never did that common, but most endearing epithet of Italian love sound so soft, so thrilling, to my ear. She was free, almost ere the words had left her pallid lips. Santugo struck down both the men who held her, and the flashing of their pistols in his face only served to increase his fury. Bearing her to the other end of the room, he defied them to come on, with a chivalric rashness not often possessed now by his countrymen.

They were not slow in accepting the invitation; their courage—as usual with the "swinish multitude"—being increased by their numbers, they pressed forward with clubbed carbines and fixed bayonets, and a sharp conflict ensued. Feeling certain that Santugo would be worsted, I forced a passage to his side, and endeavoured to beat back the assailants with my sabre; and now came the tug of war.

Francesca had swooned, and hung like a piece of drapery over Luigi's arm; the viscontessa implored mercy for her, whilst Bianca buried her face in the bosom of Annina, who lent her powerful voice to swell the clamour, reviling the intruders, and encouraging us to slay them without mercy.

The outcries of the assembled household, together with the clank of heavy boots, the clash of weapons, the snapping of pistols, the groans and cries of the wounded, and the imprecations of the troopers, and, added to this, my own voice calling fruitlessly on the assailants to fall back, to desist, made the lofty chamber seem a very pandemonium. Sometimes a pistol-shot filled the place with smoke; one ill-directed ball shattered the chandelier, scattering the wax-lights, and involving us in comparative darkness; after which, I believe, we all laid about us at random. Another ball stretched on the floor the venerable Andronicus, who had just come to our assistance, and was cutting away among the buck-skinned shins of the enemy, using his sharp couteau like a scythe.

For a time I merely used my sabre in defending Luigi and the unhappy girl who hung insensible upon him; but finding that our numerous antagonists were repeatedly having recourse to fire-arms, and that our safety was, consequently, more endangered, I slashed a few adroitly across the fingers, cleft a slice from the buffalo-head of a sbirro, and might have performed many more exploits, had not Castelfermo at that moment burst in amongst us, holding a lamp aloft in one hand, and his sword in the other.

"Basta! on peril of your lives, hold all your hands, or, by San Ermo, I will drive my sword through the body of the first who strikes!" cried this formidable cavalier, with the voice of a stentor. "Croce di Malta! has hell broken loose, or are ye mad? What! Italians fighting like wild wolves, while so many Frenchmen are yet on this side of the Alps? Sheath your sword, Santugo—back, Signor Claude; shame upon you all!"

On hearing this determined threat, and beholding the Maltese cross, the troopers of the Masse shrank back respectfully; but the furious visconte, whom the protracted conflict, the helpless state of Francesca, and a wound he had received, had worked up into a perfect frenzy, yet defied them once more to the encounter; and fear of abandoning his charge, even for a moment, alone restrained him from rushing upon them.

"Anathema! a curse upon ye, cowards!" he exclaimed; "away from my house, or abide the consequences! Corpo di Caio Mario! O that the thrice villanous bishop of Cosenza, or his contemptible minion di Bivona were here to receive at my hands the reward of all this outrage!"

"I am here, excellency," cried the tough old barone,

bursting through the throng, and confronting the fiery Santugo.

He was a thick-set, hard-featured man, and wore the scarlet cockade and scarf of the Masse, with a military sword and buff belt; though otherwise he was attired as a civilian. His grey hairs glistened in the light; he bent his keen, hollow eye on Santugo with a stern, careworn aspect, and his sword flashed as he stood on his guard with the air of a perfect fencer. With eyes absolutely blazing with animosity, the visconte was rushing upon him; but faint with loss of blood he reeled, fell upon the floor, and lay still, without signs of life. His mother uttered a piercing cry; Bianca covered her face, and knelt beside him. I, too, thought him dead; his classic features expressed all that combination of mental and corporeal agony, stiffening into rigidity, which the pencil of Guido Reni was so powerfully portrayed in some of his workt.

In the confusion which the visconte's fall occasioned, the bishop's officials easily possessed themselves of the inanimate Francesca, and bore her away in a close carriage. I was disposed to interfere, but Castelermo grasped my hand.

"Signor Claude," said he, "I honour the sentiment which prompts you to defend this unhappy lady; but contending in her favour is to fight against the church, whose cause is ever the most popular in Italy. The consecrated bride of God, sworn to Heaven at the blessed altar, D'Alfieri cannot make her his either by force or fraud. For the bosom of a lover she has left that of the church, and back to it she must return, to be chastened and mortified, but I trust not abandoned in the flesh! No, the days when that dread phrase was used have passed away. Had Santugo been more religious and less rash, her vows would have been dispensed with in the usual manner, and she might have been his happy bride; but *now*, alas! after all that has passed, they must part to meet no more. The dungeons of the castle of Cosenza, or the still more horrible vaults of Canne, must close over her, and, perhaps, for ever. Madonna, be merciful to her soul!"

The voice of Castelermo faltered, as he deplored the miseries to which the wretched Francesca would be subjected by his bigoted and superstitious countrymen. With these miseries I was then unacquainted, as I knew not the secret horrors those living tombs of Canne were yet to unfold to me, and was ignorant of the cruelties which were too often practised within the walls of continental convents, where a system of domestic persecution had replaced the greater terrors of that mighty engine of ecclesiastical tyranny, the Holy Office, whose

penishments for broken vows were founded on those to which the Roman vestals were sentenced by the law of Tarquinius Priscus.

The bishop's followers having departed, the barone di Bivona collected his horsemen and withdrew, threatening, however, to call the visconte to a severe reckoning on some future day ; indeed, his dangerous wound and Castelfermo's intervention, alone prevented his being carried off prisoner, as the bishop's warrant included him in the charge of sacrilege ; but events which soon after occurred, prevented that prelate from troubling him again about the matter.

Bivona had been despatched with thirty horsemen from the army of the Masse, in pursuit of two fugitives suspected of treason, and of tampering with the enemy ; and as he passed southward, had been requested by the bishop to assist in the capture of Francesca, whom for certain reasons, yet to be explained, that pious prelate was most eager to have in his power. The barone departed for Jacurso, in pursuit of the runaways ; but our unlucky acquaintance with him ended not that night.

The visconte's senses returned on his wounds being bound up : but he nearly suffered a relapse on discovering that Francesca was away, and in the power of the bishop's people. In his ravings he cursed us all ; he called for his horse, his sword, and pistols, and before day dawned he was in a raging fever, which brought him to the brink of the grave. Alarmed at his danger, dreadfully agitated by the scene acted before them, and in excessive sorrow for the fate of Francesca, his mother and Bianca were scarcely less ill ; so the whole household was in a state of disorder.

Mistrusting the skill of the neighbouring physicians, I despatched a note to the camp for Dr. Duncan Macdonia of ours, who was still with the medical staff. He arrived in a short time, and the visconte was committed to his care. Remembering my encounter with Francatipa, and knowing well how little a brigand's word could be relied on, I applied to the commandant at St. Eufemio for a guard to protect the villa till quieter times. Early next morning, a serjeant and fourteen rank and file of De Watteville's corps arrived. After seeing them quartered, and giving a few orders relative to the posting of sentinels, &c., accompanied by my cicerone, I once more set out, very unwillingly, on my mission to Scylla, congratulating myself, however, that my opportune return to the villa had freed it from a dangerous personage, and Bianca from a suitor so unworthy of her.

The visconte was too ill and too indignant to bid us adieu ;

but he sent word by Macnesia that we should never be forgiven for having permitted his cousin to be carried off, and that he would call us out the moment he recovered. He said he had sworn by Madonna, by the body of Bacchus, and of Cains Marius, to boot, that I must think *no more* of Bianca, who parted with me in tears, and promised, with her aunt's permission, to answer my letters, notwithstanding his threats. Thus ended my long-wished-for visit to the villa; and the event left me full of doubt and anxiety for the future.

It was evening before we were again in our saddles and en route. We hired a goatherd to conduct us by a short, though unfrequented, road to Francavilla; but it proved a long journey to us: the rogue led us the wrong way, and absconded about nightfall, leaving us among the mountain forests near Squillaci, on the Adriatic side of this land of brawl and uproar.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ADVENTURE AT THE CENTAUR.

By the wayside we met a poor and aged priest, travelling on foot; he was exhausted with toil, and his grey hair and tattered cope were covered with the dust of a long journey; he had sandals on his feet, a wallet on his back, and a long staff in his hand. I could not ride past him; I, who was young, stout, and active; so, dismounting, I marched on foot for six miles, while the thankful canon rode my caparisoned grey to Squillaci. He was a Greek priest, travelling from Rossano, where there were several monasteries of the order of St. Basil; all afterwards suppressed by Murat.

My kindness was repaid by his superior, the old abate of the Basilians, to whom he reported our arrival in the decayed and solitary town, which was then involved in the gloom and obscurity of night. We heard no sound as we entered, save that of our horses' hoofs ringing on the old Roman road, and the distant roar of the Ionian Sea, as it rolled on the reverberating shores of the gulf—the Scyllætic gulf of classical antiquity, famous for the shipwreck of “wise Ulysses,” who, as tradition asserts, with the survivors of his disaster, founded the city.

We were hospitably received by the abate, who was a true Calabrian and staunch royalist, and he made the purple wines of the province flow like water, in honour of Ferdinand and

Carolina of Naples,—“il Cavaliere Stuardo, and the brave soldiery of his Britannic majesty,—Evoe, viva!”

As we had ridden our horses at an easy pace, they held out admirably; but seventy miles of such miserable roads as those we had travelled,—ways suited only for mules, goats, and buffaloes,—were equal to a hundred on level ground. By the warlike operations of the French, the Masse, and the brigands, the rustic bridges were everywhere broken down, and the roads trenched and cut up, to hinder the passage of cannon and waggons, so we had to make many a weary detour among the hills, following sheep-tracks; at one time at the summit, at another at the bottom of a precipice: too often, we had no better road than the dry channel of a mountain stream afforded, and on such a path it required the utmost powers of spur and bridle, and all the rider's skill, to prevent the horse breaking his knees, by slipping on the wave-worn pebbles.

On quitting the monastery next morning, we beheld the ceremony of a military salutation of the consecrated host, by a party of the Sicilian volunteers belonging to Kempt's brigade, then lying there in cantonment.

The host was borne aloft through the streets by the venerable abate, followed in solemn procession by his Greek Basilians, carrying crosses, banners, relics of saints and martyrs, smoking censers, and lighted tapers, which filled the air with perfume. They moved to the sound of a low chant, and the whole population knelt bare-headed on each side as they passed. The Sicilian infantry formed a lane, with the ranks facing inwards,—the commanding officer kneeling in front, while the arms were presented, the colours levelled to the dust, and the drums beat a march on the flanks. Castel-erme dismounted, and knelt on the pavement; but I, like an heretical Presbyterian, kept my saddle; yet the sour looks of the watchful fathers softened when I uncovered my head,—for I was well aware that it would have been gross disrespect not to have done so, on an occasion so solemn.

Turning our horses eastward, to regain our lost ground, we passed through the village of Jacurso, and the town of Francavilla, crossed the stream of Angistola, and ascended towards Monteleone, whose castled height and groves of oak burst at once upon our view, as we turned an angle of the mountain-path. At our feet spread the Tyrrhene Sea, calmly rolling, and stretching like a vast blue mirror from St. Eufemio to Castello di Bivona, whilst its waves flashed golden in the sun, as they broke on the distant promontory of Tropea,—the

Portus Hercules of the Romans. Further westward, the dim but sunny horizon was streaked by the light smoke ascending from the peak of Stromboli, nearly fifty miles distant. Around us, the country was like a beautiful garden: the maple, the vallonias oak, the dark, sepulchral cypress, the wild acacia, the towering pine, the pistachio, the sweet-chestnut, and the walnut-trees, all displayed their varying foliage on the lowlands, while the quivering aspen and evergreen oleander waved their leafy branches from the sandy rocks. Sheltered by graceful weeping-willows and lofty Judas-trees, little cottages peeped out on the green hill-sides, whilst the ruddy orange, the golden apple, the pomegranate, the almond, the grape, and the plum, were flourishing around in glorious luxuriance, beneath the warm light of an unclouded sun.

Spangled with myriads of flowers, the green and lofty hills reared their verdant or wooded summits to the azure sky; numerous flocks browsed on their sides, beneath the shepherd's care, and the cawing rooks wheeled in airy circles around them. We were always greeted with a wave of the hat by the guardians of this modern Arcadia, who lay basking on the grassy sward, or sat beneath the brow of an ivy-clad rock, or a shadowy tree, where they had slept away the night in their rough tabarri. Each had by him his keen-eyed wolf-dog, courageous in spirit, strong, muscular, and beautiful in form, with bushy tail, and long hairy coat, whiter than snow. These dogs watched, alternately, the browsing herds, the twittering birds, and the dark eyes of their indolent masters, who spent their solitary hours in smoking home-made cigars, sucking liquorice-root, carving cudgels, scraping reeds for the zampogna, or improvising their mistresses on the three-stringed guitar.

The breeze from the Tyrrhene Sea swept over the fertile shore, making the morning air delightfully cool and agreeable; but, when noon approached, we were glad to halt at Monteleone, until its fierce glow and suffocating closeness had passed away.

Monteleone (a marquisate which Buonaparte had bestowed on one of the most famous and favoured of his officers) lies close to the base of lofty mountains, which are covered with the richest foliage during the greater part of the year: they form a part of that mighty chain which runs through the centre of all Italy. Its regular streets and handsome houses, built in the picturesque style of the country, were securely enclosed by a fortified wall, where the bayonets of our sentinels were gleaming through loop and embrasure. On the

towers of its castle, which were half hidden amid a wood of lordly oaks and pines, the standard of Naples drooped listlessly ; every breath of wind had died away, and the air was hot and still ; profound silence reigned in the streets, and the white, sunny pavement appeared new and strange to us, after riding so long on the green velvet turf of the country. Both piazza and street were lonely and deserted ; the citizens were enjoying their forenoon nap, and the sentinels kept close within their boxes.

We put up at an inn, or hotel, over the arched portal of which projected a hideous centaur, holding aloft a sign-board, on which a long string of verses informed us that Andrea da Fossi gave the best entertainment in Italy for man and horse. Beneath this peeped out a coat armorial, cut in stone, time-worn and decayed, but the collar that surrounded it bore the order of the Crescent, instituted by Rindler of Anjou, on his conquering Sicily. Above this, was the coronet of the princes of Squillaci, to whom, in happier times, the edifice had been a palace, and, though partly ruined, altered, and transmogrified, it still bore traces of its ancient grandeur.

"We shall be well quartered here," said Casteltermo, with a sigh of weariness, as we dismounted, both feeling inactive enough after our long morning ride ; "but if Signor da Fossi promises more than he can perform, why then, basta ! my riding-rod shall cultivate acquaintance with his shoulders. We gentlemen of Malta like not to be trifled with."

The ostlers received our horses, and, with much ceremony, we were ushered upstairs by mine host himself (who, indeed, was seldom troubled with visitors), and led into a magnificent room of the old palace : the cushions of the sofas and chairs were of scarlet silk, figured with gold ; the hangings were of crimson velvet, edged with the same costly material ; the ceiling was in fresco, and the floor of fancy tiles ; while the tables were slabs of white or yellow marble, on columns of gilded wood. Above a sideboard, stood a little Madonna in a niche, with a lamp before it, before which, on entering, Casteltermo made a most profound genuflection : we afterwards found it very convenient for our cigars.

Wine and iced water were the first refreshments we summoned ; then throwing open the windows, which faced the west, to admit the cool breeze from the distant sea, we drew the dark, thick curtains, to elude the glaring sun, and each threw himself upon a sofa, overcome with fatigue and lassitude. What a relief I experienced when divested of my sash and belt, and its heavy appurtenances, the sword and sabre-

tache; and when I exchanged, for a light shell-jacket, the tight regimentals, in which it was no joke to be harnessed and buttoned, from waist to chin, in a climate so sultry.

Among novelists and narrators, an inn has always been famous as a place of introduction, a starting-point, or the casual scene of unexpected rencontres and adventures; and so "Il Centauro" proved to us; we had not been two hours beneath its roof, before we became involved in a very heart-stirring affair.

The waiter had cleared away a hasty luncheon, and the glittering decanters of well-iced champagne and gioja, the salvers of cool, refreshing grapes, and little maccaroons, sweet as sugar and almonds could make them, were all receiving due justice from myself and cicerone. The sun was verging westward, the air grew more cool, and we were beginning to breathe again, when a bustle was heard at the gate of the inn-yard, and an elderly man, armed like an officer of the Loyal Masse, and dressed in a suit of light green, bare-headed, and with his long white hair streaming behind him, dashed through the archway on a swift and powerful horse—one of the true Barbary breed, clean-legged, compact, black as jet, and full of blood and fire. It was covered with foam, and seemed to have been ridden far and fast; for no sooner did the fierce rider pull impetuously up, than the noble horse staggered back upon its haunches, threw up its head wildly, and then rolled in the dust beneath the weight of its double burden; for a young girl was seated across the holsters. She clung to the officer with a degree of terror and affection, which at once excited our interest and curiosity; and uttering a cry of despair, as their last hope, the brave horse, sank beneath them, she fainted; but the old cavalier, disengaging himself from the falling steed, bore her up harmless, and in a manner so graceful and adroit, that Marco clapped his hands and muttered "Basta!" The days of the Barbary courser were ended; stretching out his long yet slender legs, he beat the gravel with quivering hoof, and protruded a dry white tongue; a spasm convulsed his form, the dark blood gushed in a torrent from his dilated nostrils, and the brave horse moved no more.

"Horses, fresh horses for Scylla," cried the cavalier.

"Quick! as you value life—fresh horses!"

"Maladetto," muttered Andrea da Fossi, nonplussed, "we have not had such a thing these three years as relays of horses. When Signor the marchese di Montaleone——"

"Enough—the old story. Are there British troops in the town?"

"In the castle, signor."

"Blessed be Madonna, then we are saved! Farewell! my faithful Barbary, that has borne me through the hot perils of many a dangerous day; thou hast failed me now!" said the old officer, turning to his dead horse, and gazing wistfully upon it. A tear shone in his eye; it was the feeling of a moment; other and weightier cares pressed close upon him, and he advanced to the inn-door with the inanimate lady.

The burly Andrea seemed rather unwilling to admit guests who came in such a questionable manner; but Castelfermo and I cut the matter short by conducting the strangers into our apartment; while their horse-furniture was pounced upon by the innkeeper, to make sure amends so far for any trouble or expense he might be put to on their account. His wife and the female part of the household, used all means to restore the inanimate girl; after which I had leisure to observe her companion. He was a fine-looking old man, somewhere about sixty, with all the *beau-ideal* of the gentlemanly old soldier in his figure, aspect, and address; his thin hair and moustaches were silvered with age, and his cheek had been well tanned by the fourteen years' campaigning of the French invasion; his coat was laced with silver and girt with a scarlet sash, after the fashion of the Masse, and he wore a heavy sabre of Eastern fashion, which, when he laid it on a side-table, Andrea da Fossi also secured, unobserved. So deep was his anxiety, so vivid his excitement, while the young girl slowly revived, that he had not as yet addressed us; but kept his face closely bent over her.

We became deeply interested in their fortunes.

"'Tis some wild love-adventure, like poor Luigi's," whispered Castelfermo; "may it end less fatally! The cavalier is none of the youngest; but this pretty donzella has quite won my friendship."

At that moment the heavy velvet curtains were withdrawn, the bright light of the setting sun poured into the room, and the stranger turned towards us.

"Major Gismondo!" we both exclaimed, now recognizing him, for the first time, through the dust which powdered his altered features.

"The same, signori," said he, with a grave bow, and, grasping our hands. "Thank God you are here; we are safe, then; Signor Dundas can protect us—my daughter is

saved!" He covered his face with his handkerchief, while Marco handed him wine.

"Poor little Luisa!" said Castelfermo. "Claude, saw you ever a girl so beautifully fair? But, in Heaven's name, what has happened?—speak, Signor Gismondo."

"You shall hear, when these people are gone—when Luisa recovers. My tongue can scarcely articulate; patience—but a minute!"

He was dreadfully exhausted and agitated. Castelfermo might well term Luisa fair; one excepted, her face appeared to me the most enchanting I had yet seen in Calabria. Though less showy and stately than the three sisters D'Alfieri, her beauty was, perhaps, more touching and girlish. A tight satin vest, with sleeves that reached only to the elbow, displayed the full outline of her bust, whose whole proportions were equally just and delicate. The thick white lace which edged her bodice, and fell in folds from her short sleeves, could not rival in whiteness the snowy arms and swelling bosom, of which her disordered attire revealed rather more than usual. Her complexion was remarkably pale for an Italian girl; but the arch of her brown eyebrows, the length of her lashes, and the delicate little lids they fringed, were perfectly beautiful; her cheeks were full and round, almost imperceptibly tinged with red, and, as Marco said of her mouth, so pretty and pouting, it "seemed formed only for kisses." The girl was a very Hebe! and not more than sixteen. The glossy ringlets of her long hair streamed in the sunlight, like a golden shower, over the shoulder of the old man on whose arm she rested, and who hung over her with all the tenderness and anxiety she merited. After a time, she sighed deeply, disclosing a row of little white teeth, pure as those of an infant, and opening her eyes she became at once alive to the scene around her. The vivacity which sparkled in those bright blue orbs, together with the crimson blush which overspread her face and polished neck, made her appear a thousand times more attractive than before. "It was, the hectic of a moment;" it died away. Alas! the poor girl was utterly exhausted, and almost speechless.

"My daughter! have I saved you, only to see you perish from fatigue?" said Gismondo, in a faltering voice. "Luisa, look up—'tis your poor father who speaks! Hear me, little one!"

She embraced him closely, and burst into tears.

"Luisa!"

"Caro padre, are they near us yet?"

"About three leagues in the rear, perhaps," he replied in a troubled voice.

"And these gentlemen?"

"Our friends, and, I trust, our saviours! You remember the Signor di Castelermo?"

"O yes; and Signor Claude," she added in a faint voice.

"May their timely presence and intervention avert that most dread catastrophe, of which even the contemplation is horror."

"You may depend upon us—ay, to the death!" said we both at once.

"You are pursued, I have reason to believe;" added the Maltese knight.

"Yes; and wish to continue our journey."

"Where to, signor?"

"Anywhere to safety, but my poor daughter would certainly expire with fatigue if we rode a league further. We have travelled seventy miles on the spur, without drawing bridle once, save when Luisa's horse fell beneath her in the wilderness of La Sylva, when I was compelled to take her on the saddle of my own gallant Barbary. Often, since then, have we been in deadly peril; when lynxes shrieked, and herds of forest wolves howled behind us—when rivers foamed in front, and the mountain robbers showered their bullets from the rocks—I trembled and I prayed, but only for my daughter; and God—good and merciful—has spared her. Cavalieri! I am very unfortunate—I throw myself upon your generosity; and when did one soldier implore in vain the generosity of another? I trust that, like honourable men, you will stand by me in the coming peril, not for my sake, but for that of this poor sufferer, whom the Mother of Mercy preserve from the fury of those who are tracking her with horse and horn, as if she were some wild bear of Abruzzi, instead of the adorable girl she is. Perdition—let them come! The cowards shall find that Battista Giamondo has a willing heart and able hand to defend the child that God has given, and the last that war and man have left him." He pressed the trembling girl to his breast; she sobbed convulsively, and nearly relapsed into unconsciousness.

"O my father!" exclaimed she, in piercing accents; "padre mio, my lips refuse to utter what my heart would bid them say; I can only hang upon your neck and sob like a little child, and kiss your cheek, and weep. My father, I have destroyed you."

"Say rather, Luisa, that by casting temptation in your way, I have been the destroyer of you. Peace, peace little heart! Ah! how it beats and flutters;" he added, half playfully, pressing his fingers on her bosom.

"There are those at hand who may soon make it cease to beat for ever," said she, in a faint voice, and, sinking backwards on the sofa, her eyes closed, and the pallor of her hue increased.

"Madonna, preserve my child!" exclaimed the old cavalier, beating his breast, while his eyes gleamed with fear and distraction, for at that moment the noise of advancing hoofs was heard on the hard, dusty road that wound down from the mountains. Though the inn stood within the Porto Nuove of the town, we could hear the din of the pursuers, but it sounded faint and distant.

"Major Gismondo, I implore you to tell us the meaning of all this," said I.

"They come," replied he, turning round to look for his sabre, "they come; and with renewed vigour, too, to judge by the trampling hoofs. Perdition! all the powers in Italy, or in hell below it, shall not separate us while hand and hilt can hold together; but, O San Gennaro, what has my poor child done to be persecuted thus? I had hopes of reaching the British fleet, when, perhaps, we should have found safety, but I trust that with you, Captain Dundas, I shall find that protection which your countrymen never refuse to the unfortunate." I bowed, but understood him not.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOVE AND WAR.

"GENTLEMEN," he continued, when the room had been cleared of Fossi and his household, who were all in an agony of curiosity, "you know me well; I am Battista Gismondo, a major of the Loyal Masse, and this is my daughter, Luisa. After the events of these few hours past, I can scarcely deem myself the same person; I am bewildered. Luisa is the last of a once numerous family; but my sons—my sons!—they have all gone before me to God; one perished on the walls of Andria, one in the breach of Altamura, and three in the hands of the French; cruelly and savagely shot as rebels by

the marchese di Monteleone, whom Madonna forgive ! for I never can.

"When that unrelenting commander was attacked by our patriots at La Sylva,—where all perished save himself and his aide-de-camp—from the rocks above that hideous gorge I beheld the work of death. It was a scene of thrilling horror. Within that narrow space, hemmed in on every hand—in front, in rear, on each side, and above—the rifles poured down volleys of leaden hail ; miserable was the slaughter of the unhappy Frenchmen.

"The whole vale was enveloped in smoke, and its dark rocks were illuminated by the flashing musketry ; the shrieks and yells of vengeance, of despair, and death, and the roar of the fire-arms, reverberated among the echoing hills, mingled with the crash of enormous stones, which, rent from the solid mountains, and urged by strong, revengeful hands, fell thundering on the foe beneath. Few have looked upon such a scene ; but I thought only of my sons, and laughed scornfully as the cries of agony—the last agony of many a parting soul—arose from the smoky gulf below me. The measure of revenge was full. Of all that gallant band, the marchese and his aide-de-camp alone escaped. Brave, resolute, and maddened, he forced his gallant horse up the walls of basaltic rock (which on every hand enclose the valley, so that it seems like a vast pit or well) and, missed by a thousand bullets, he dashed down the mountains unhurt, and disappeared.

"His aide-de-camp, a French officer, young, and equally brave, strove to imitate his example ; spurring his horse up the rocks, he rushed from the gloomy dell, and emerged suddenly, almost at my feet. How terrible was his aspect ! at this moment I can behold him ; the panting horse, with starting eyes, erect mane, and snorting nostrils ; the breathless rider, bareheaded and pale—his face streaked with blood—his broken sabre gleaming in his hand.

"'France ! France !—vive l'Empereur !' cried he, and was dashing on, when a stray bullet struck his horse ; it plunged wildly forward, and rolled dead on the turf, hurling its rider at my feet. The next moment my knee was upon his breast, and my sabre at his throat ; his sword-arm was broken—he was powerless.

"'Ruffian !' he exclaimed, 'would you slay me in cold blood ?'

"'As your countrymen slew my sons,' was my fierce rejoinder ; he saw but little mercy in my aspect at that moment.

“‘Old man,’ said he, with a faltering voice, ‘if you are indeed a father, spare me for my father’s sake, if you will not for my own!’

“‘So pleaded my sons, perhaps—but no! they would have scorned to ask mercy of a Frenchman. Enough, young man; with me you are safe; like yourself, I am an officer, and will do nothing that is unworthy of a gentleman.’ I assisted him to rise. ‘Your name, signor?’

“‘Philippe Regnier, a lieutenant of the first regiment—the favourite corps of Napoleon.’

“‘Would you had some other name than that of our accursed persecutor.’

“‘Beware, sir!’ exclaimed the other haughtily; ‘if you mean Regnier, chevalier of the Iron Crown, and general of division under the emperor—he is my father.’

“‘It is enough,’ I replied. ‘Young man, he is our deadly enemy; yet I will say nought to which his son may not listen with an unruffled brow; but, as you value life, utter not his name in the hearing of an Italian. You must be aware of the necessity for this.’

“He bowed. To preserve him from the fury of the followers of Francatropa, I conveyed him to my house, which was not far distant. Night had descended on the unfinished work of death, and we retired unseen. The poor French youth was deeply grateful for my care; he suffered acutely from his broken arm and a wound on the head, where a ball had laid bare the temple; fever ensued, he grew worse daily, and was brought almost to the brink of the grave; yet I dared not bring him any medical assistance. Had the secret of his dwelling at my house been noised abroad, his doom had been sealed as a Frenchman, and mine as a traitor; my house would have been levelled to the ground. He had no other nurse or attendant than my poor little daughter.—Signori, spare the tears and blushes of my dear Luisa, by imagining the rest. Both were young, handsome, and ardent; too much so to be thrown so entirely together, and left so much in each other’s society, as our secluded habitation and my long and frequent absences compelled them to be.

“I discovered their passion at last; but I could blame neither; having long anticipated and dreaded it as an evil not to be averted. I could not leave the poor French lad to perish on the mountains, and to none, save my daughter, in these times of peril, could I with safety and honour to myself have imparted the secret of his escape and existence. Yet I could not restrain a stern reproof.

“‘By heaven, Signor Philippe,’ said I, ‘you have not acted well in smiting the hand that spared your life on the battle-field, and has since fostered you so tenderly; by indulging in this passion, which with you is fleeting—thought of but for a moment—you have stung the heart that warmly cherished and saved you from the just vengeance of our incensed people. In so doing, I have placed in imminent jeopardy my life, my honour, and the high reputation of my family for patriotism and loyalty, and this is my reward; you gain the love of my daughter, on whom you can never bestow your hand—the difference of clime, of manners, and, above all, your political position, forbid it, and raise up a mighty barrier between you. I honour you as a brave youth, but of an accursed nation; I wish you well, and shall ever do so—yet, in the name of Madonna, recover your health and rejoin your father’s army.’

“‘And wherefore, my dear Monsieur Gismondo, is the barrier so insuperable?’ said he, starting from the sofa on which he reclined, and taking my hand in one of his, whilst the other held that of Luisa, who hid her blushing face, as she hides it now, behind her silken tresses.—‘Better times—oh, yes! better and happier times are in store for both France and Italy, on whose united throne now sits our emperor, crowned by the hand of Ruffo, raised by the valour of his soldiers, and blessed by the favour of God.’

“‘To the young, all things seem possible,’ said I, coldly; ‘to me, whose heart is seared, whose beard is grey, whose head the hand of time has bared, the future can never be so bright as the past. Believe me, Philippe, I esteem you highly, and know none on whom I would more willingly bestow this fair bud—the last of my race!—than on thee.’

“‘Perhaps this was too honest an avowal—too great a concession; but, ere I could retract it, Philippe exclaimed:—

“‘Oh! joy, my dear major; you know not how happy you make me—us—ah! let me say *us*,’ he added, drawing Luisa towards him. ‘Promise me, good Monsieur Gismondo, that when peace comes—as come it soon must, when we have tossed all the enemies of Joseph into the sea at Scylla, and when France and Italy have become one—and *one* they shall be, for the emperor has so willed it—promise me that *mademoiselle* shall be mine. Oh! good sir, complete the joy of this hour by giving a promise, which I know you will rather die than break.’

“‘Their upturned faces blushed with youth and love; their eyes beamed with delight and hope; and the fair golden curls

of my daughter almost mingled with the raven hair of the Frenchman. It was a picture of beauty and happiness that I had not the heart to destroy; I promised, and signed the cross above them.

"I will redeem my pledge when France and Italy are one," said I; "but ~~when~~ will that day come to pass?" I added, mentally, on turning away and leaving the happy lovers together. "Yes, ere that time comes, Charybdis shall give up its wrecks, and Etna vomit water, in lieu of flame."

"In truth, I loved the lad, because I had saved his life, for which he seemed sincerely grateful to me; and I could not but admire his courage and heroic enthusiasm, though in the cause of that bad and renegade emperor, whose name is enough to make the blood boil in every Italian heart. At that time I saw little prospect of M. Regnier being united to my daughter; but, as it was impossible to foresee what turn the tide of war might take, I thought it well that Luisa had in the French camp so powerful a friend as the general's son. These ideas might be selfish, but I knew that care and the hand of time were beginning to lie heavier on me; that I was exposed to the innumerable dangers of continual strife, and that, when God called upon me, my poor little daughter would be alone in the world."

The old officer stopped; he sobbed audibly, and I saw the heavy tears which oozed from his grey eyelashes, falling on the fair forehead and sunny hair of his daughter. It was a picture. Alas! he heard not, as we did, the distant clang of advancing horses, so much was he absorbed in his story.

"To be brief," he continued, "M. Regnier departed next day, disguised as a buffalo-herd. I conducted him in safety to his father's camp at Maida, where, two days after, the British obtained that victory so glorious to themselves, and so suspicious to Italy. Their foes retired with precipitation, and the bright future which Luisa and her lover had so fondly anticipated, became enveloped in gloom and obscurity. Philippe escaped unhurt, but lost the standard of his regiment in that desperate single combat with you, Captain Dundas.

"I belonged to one of those battalions of the Masse which so closely invested General Regnier's intrenched camp at Cassano. Luisa was with me, and, from my tent, she could daily see the sentinels in the blue uniform of Philippe's regiment, almost within musket-shot. Hourly we were engaged in skirmishes with the enemy, who were soon driven to the utmost extremity. Being joined by Frà Diavolo, Mammone, and some of the loyalist brigands, and hearing that Marshal

Massena was rapidly advancing, the chiefs of the *Masse* directed that, an hour after *Ave Maria* on the night before last, a general and grand assault would be made on the French encampment, and an order was circulated strictly forbidding quarter to be shown to any of the enemy. For three days there had been a cessation of hostilities, and our false leaders resolved to fall upon our foes at a moment when an attack was least expected.

"A rocket sent up from the mountains was to be our signal—*VENGIANZA!* our watchword; but traitors were amongst us; and, fully acquainted with the plotting of our treacherous chiefs, Regnier resolved to anticipate the attack, and overwhelm them with confusion and dismay.

"*Ave-Maria* passed, one by one the stars began to glimmer in the darkening sky, silently our troops began to muster in their ranks, and many an eye was bent to the gloomy mountains, awaiting the red burst of the rocket. I was bidding a hasty and sorrowful adieu to my daughter, who was doubly agitated with anxiety for the fate of both her father and lover, when the roar of the French artillery opening on our field-works from every part of their intrenchments, the clang of their galloping cavalry, and the shout of '*Vive l'Empereur!*' as their whole light troops made a desperate sortie, equally furious and unexpected, made me grasp my sabre, and rush from the presence of Luisa.

"Led by Regnier in person, the French burst headlong on our trenches, and both horse and foot scoured all the approaches, from which the *Masse* fled with precipitation. Three of our chiefs, many cavaliers of distinction, and a thousand Italian soldiers perished in the slaughter; after which, the French retired leisurely within their defences, without the loss of a man."

"*Basto!* and all this took place but two nights ago?" exclaimed Castelfermo.

"But the worst remains to be told. Not Dante's self could describe the fierce longing for reprisals—the wrath, the horror of our people at daybreak. They beat their breasts and tore their hair; they raved like maniacs; they called on the chiefs to lead them against the foe; the air was laden with their shout—it was '*Vengianza.*'"

"Anon, there rose a universal cry of treason! and every man looked with dark scrutiny in the face of his comrade. In the midst of this, while seated with Luisa in my tent, I was surprised by seeing a hand raise the canvas wall, and throw in a piece of paper, on which was written:—

" ' If you value the lives of yourself and daughter, fly! A letter from the son of General Regnier, and addressed to the Signora Luisa, was last night found in your tent, and is now lying before the chiefs in council. They are at this moment deliberating on the mode of her death, whether by the cord or bullet; she is supposed to have acquainted the French with the projected assault of last night. There is not a moment to be lost—away! *A Friend to the Major Gismondo.*'

" I felt crushed and broken to the earth; for a time my mind was a chaos; then it was wrung with the bitterest anguish, while my cheek glowed with indignation and shame. Had I been alone, to have rushed to our nobles and repelled with scorn the insinuation would have been the thought and deed of a moment; but my child made a coward of me; the wild shouts of our lawless soldiery were ringing around us, and our stern chiefs were sitting in council, deciding upon the death of my daughter—my poor innocent Luisa.

" We stole from the camp, procured horses, and fled, but not unperceived; we have been pursued fiercely and hotly, and have passed through innumerable toils and horrors. Our only chance of safety lay in getting on board the British fleet; or under your friendly flag, Signor Dundas. Thank Heaven! it waves over Monteleone, and I trust our pursuers will respect it; but deadly, indeed, must be the purpose of those who have followed us so rapidly and so far, without drawing bridle."

CHAPTER XXX.

POOR LUISA!

DUSK had set in ere his relation concluded, and the exhausted girl had fallen into a deep slumber on his breast. Just as the waiter—who probably had heard the whole story through the keyhole—brought in lights, a party of armed horsemen galloped through the Porto Nuovo, and halted.

" Which way, said you?" asked one.

" The Centauro, monsignore," replied a voice; it was that of Da Fossi, our villanous host; and the same party of irregular cavalry we had encountered at the villa D'Alfieri, wheeled into the inn-yard.

" They come! O, my father—O, my God!" cried the un-

happy girl, embracing her parent. "O, Signor Claude!—O, Cavaliere di Castelormo, protect us!"

"My daughter!" gasped the old man. "Ah! the agony of this moment! Signor," he added, addressing me, "intercede for us. As a British officer, you may do much; my daughter, she may yet be saved—spared to cheer the little time that is left me."

"On my honour! major, we will stand by you to the last," I replied, while my heart melted at the old man's passionate entreaties. "Let us close up and barricade the door, while a message is despatched to the castle for the inlying piquet."

"Thanks, thanks, Madonna bless you! you may do much—and yet for what can I hope?" he muttered, with an air of distraction, as he laid his half-lifeless daughter on the sofa, and looked round him for his sabre.

"Signor Claude," whispered Mareo in an agitated manner; "I can only contemplate with horror the probable issue of this affair. Be wary of using your sword," he observed, as I buckled it on. "Innocent as the signorina may be, appearances are against her, and the Masse carry matters with a high hand."

Ere I could reply, we heard the following orders by the leader of the party:—

"Surround the house, and shoot all who attempt to escape. Unslung carbines!" He at the same time leaped from his horse, and rushed up the staircase. A trampling of heavy boots, a jangling of steel spurs and scabbards succeeded—the door of our apartment was thrown open by our half-frightened, half-officious landlord, bowing humbly, with a candle in each hand, and our acquaintance of the preceding evening, the stern old barone of castello di Bivona pressed forward, followed by fifteen or twenty well-armed, but motley-garbed troopers.

"Traitor! a devil of a chase you have given us," said he, striking his sword on the floor.

"Ahi! protect me, my father! they are come—these enemies of our peace—of my innocent love. Save me! or kiss me, and let me die."

"Die!" reiterated her father, in a dreadful tone.

"Surrender all here, in the name of the king!" said the baron, in a loud voice; "in the name of Ferdinand of Naples and Sicily."

"How now, my lord," I inquired, throwing myself forward; "this is a private apartment, and by what right do you make this intrusion?"

"In right of the name I have mentioned. But who are

you, that assume this air of authority ?" he asked, with a frown of surprise.

"What my uniform proclaims. I am one whom you would do well in addressing more politely."

"And your friend is a cavalier of Malta ?"

Marco bowed.

"Well, gentlemen, I am a Neapolitan barone, a chief of the Masse, and commandant of irregular cavalry ; empowered to capture this unfortunate fugitive, and execute upon her a sentence decreed by the chiefs in council at Cassano—the reward due to treason and leaguings with the enemy. Signori, well aware, as you must be, of the utter futility of resisting the authority with which I am invested, it will be wiser to restrain the sorrow of this unhappy parent, than to attempt to defeat the views of justice. The girl must *die* ! As for *you*, signor," he added, addressing me particularly,—perhaps because I did not seem to care much for his "authority,"—"we have met before ; and if my followers are again obstructed, a formal complaint shall be sent to General Sir John Stuart, and you must abide the consequence. The edicts of the chiefs of the Masse are, just now, the laws of the land. Seize the woman !"

The soldiers advanced, the poor father threw himself before his daughter ; I started, but Marco grasped my arm, and I observed that his dark cheek was turning pale ; he bit his nether lip, and said, "Resistance is indeed vain."

"Monsignore Barone," cried the old major, in a trembling voice, "for the love of the blessed Madonna, spare my daughter ! By the head of the pope !—by the bones of the saints !—by God himself !—I swear to you she is innocent. The child that is unborn—yea, the beatified Mary herself, was not more pure. 'Tis my daughter," he added, in a bewildered manner ; "O, the little creature I have nurtured from infancy,—and to perish thus ! 'Tis my daughter—my child—the last of *them*—she—pity me, Signor Barone—you are very good—her mother was slain by a cannon-ball at Altamura—my arms were around her when her soul went up to her Redeemer. My daughter is pure—innocent—innocent as Madonna !"

"Poor man ! you blaspheme," said the barone.

"Spare her, signor illustrissimo,—have mercy : it is good to do so, and pleasant to the eye of Heaven. Think how you may one day crave it at the throne of Grace, when the deeds of this hour will stand recorded against you in letters of fire. Spare her, for my sake ! Remember all I have endured and

done for my country. Behold these scars, gained when Macdonald was driven from Terracina: her brothers have all followed their mother; they have gone before me to heaven,—they died for Italy! Remember, monsignore, when Ettore Caraffa, the count of Ruvo, took Andrea by storm, and reduced it to ruins and ashes,—remember how I saved your life at the risk of my own; how my boy, my dark-haired Battista,—O, my God, the last of five,—fought for you, and fell at your feet, covered with wounds. I dragged you from the press, through flames, and balls, and bayonets,—ha! ha!—you were then wounded, faint, and bleeding, but you promised, in a burst of gratitude, that if ever you could serve me, you would do it, even to the peril of your life. *Yours* I seek not, but the life that I gave—the life of my daughter.” Gismondo uttered another sepulchral laugh. “The hour is now come, Signor Barone, and I call upon you to redeem the given promise—the life of my daughter.”

“Santo Gennaro!” muttered the old barone, in a troubled voice, as he smote his forehead, “what an hour of shame and agony is this! Give me back the lives of two sons, now lying dead in the trenches of Cassano, slain by the treachery of your daughter,—hear you that, Maggiore Gismondo?—by her leaguings with the enemy.—Away with her to the verandah, and knot a halter, some of you. *Povero voi!* entreat me not, vile traitress!” he exclaimed, roughly shaking off the horror-stricken girl, who clasped his knees. “Most unhappily for thee, I remember, at this moment, but too poignantly the loss of my gallant sons. Forward, some of you: seize this unfortunate father; he must not see that which is to ensue. Away with him, and secure the daughter. I would to Heaven, some other than Di Bivona had been sent on this cursed hangman’s errand!”

“My sabre! my sabre!” cried Gismondo, wildly rushing round the room, and dashing the chairs and tables right and left in his frenzy.

Seized by many powerful hands, the parent and child were torn asunder: the former was borne away, almost senseless, to a neighbouring monastery; happily for herself, the latter lay in a deep swoon.

“Quick!” cried Bivona, “for Heaven’s sake! get this affair over as soon as possible.”

“Would monsignore wait till she recovers a little, to pray?” said Baptistello Varro, whom I now recognized as one of the troopers, and who alone seemed to recoil with disgust from

the task imposed. "Ah! signor, permit her a little time to pray."

"No, no, Varro, that would be cruelty; we have not a moment to spare for tears and entreaties. Diavolo! if once she opens these blue eyes of hers, we may be bewitched; there is that in their glance,—'tis the mal-occhio! And *you*, gentlemen," he addressed us, "will do me the favour to remain where you are, or interfere at your peril."

Gladly would we have resisted, to save this poor victim from those stern and unrelenting patriots; but, as our efforts would have been perfectly futile, and a serious compromise of our own safety, we were compelled to become spectators of the horrible scene which ensued,—one, of which I willingly give but a hurried description.

From one of the rafters of a covered verandah, or gallery, which projected on rough wooden columns round three sides of the court or quadrangle of the inn, Baptistello suspended a strong cord with a noose; two red torches, streaming in the night-wind, were held aloft, and cast their fitful glare around. The picturesque façade of the old palace, with the rude alterations made by Da Fossi,—its broad eaves, its gloomy galleries, vine-clad columns, and gleaming casements; the motley group of wild-looking volunteers, with their Calabrian troop-horses, and glancing bucklers and weapons; the dark visages of those who bore the poor girl to the place of death; and the beautiful victim herself, with her pale cheek and paler bosom, and the dishevelled tresses of her long, bright hair, which the old man loved to stroke, were illumined by the strong red light poured from the torches, whilst a dusky gloom enveloped the background: the whole scene would have formed a striking subject for the pencil of a Salvator Rosa.

Revived by the cool night-wind, the lips of Luisa were beginning to move; she sighed deeply. Ah! it was agony to contemplate that beautiful bosom, now throbbing almost for the last time! She opened her eyes, but closed them instantly, as a torch close by flashed full upon her face; consciousness was just returning, as the detestable cord was placed round her pure and slender throat.

"Madonna—Madonna receive her!" exclaimed Castelfermo, as he held his crucifix aloft to heaven. "Mother of mercy, look on her!—O, gran Dio!" he ejaculated, as she was tossed over the balcony.

There was a horrid jerking and cracking sound, as the cord strained with her weight; her blue eyes opened,—oh!

frightful was their aspect, as the light of the sputtering torches fell on them, and still more frightful were the distortions of that enchanting form,—but for a moment only. There it swung round, vibrating, then hung still and motionless; the fair head drooped heavily forward, and the long, bright ringlets floated in disorder on the passing wind.

“To horse, and away!” cried Di Bivona; and, ere his party had clattered through the Porto Nuovo, Marco and I returned to our apartment, sickening with disgust and horror.

“Basta! let us quit this accursed den, and seek some place of amusement,” said the knight. “There is surely some gaming-house or merry cantina in Monteleone. Let us go.”

“With all my soul,” said I. “Some of the Cornican Rangers are in garrison here. I had a brother amongst them once, and know the corps well, having many friends in it.”

“Buono! we shall be sure to fall in with the officers somewhere,—at the cafés or the promenade.”

We left the inn about the same time that two men of the *Compagnia di Morti* bore away the remains of Luisa Gismondo in a shell, covered by a pall; around it walked six others, carrying torches, and completely enveloped in sack-cloth, having even their faces covered by a black hood, which descended to the chin. They formed a grim and mysterious group, as they wound, by the light of their links, through a dark and narrow alley, to the entrance of some obscure and ghastly charnel-house.

“And Luisa was the bosom friend of Bianca!” thought I, as their monotonous chant died away. “What a tale of horror I have to tell the family of Alfieri!”

Of the Major Gismondo, I shall have to relate more hereafter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SIEGE OF SCYLLA.

NEXT evening we arrived at Scylla—the Scylla of classical antiquity, hoary, and worn with the storms of ages, dark with the lapse of years; the stronghold, successively, of the Greek, the Roman, the fair-haired Goth, the swarthy Saracen, the mail-clad Norman knight, the proud Italian prince, the prouder Spaniard, and, lastly, the grasping Gaul. As we approached it, Castelfermo bade me remark the roar of the ocean in the caverns beneath the rock, which rises perpendicularly from the water, and is still of considerable danger to mariners. To the ancients it was terrible, on account of its real and fabled dangers, which occupy so prominent a place in the heroic poems of Homer, Ovid, and others; and famous for the loves of Glaucus, and the magic art of Circe, the daughter of the sun (who transformed the beautiful nymph Scylla into that tall rock, which “bulged the pride of famed Ulysses’ fleet”), and the roar of whose dogs was so terrible to Æneas and his followers.

Opposite, rose the fair and fruitful coast of Sicily, the spires of Messina, and the green ridge of the Neptunian hills, behind which sank the setting sun, whose last rays changed the hue of the ocean from blue to purple; the Straits were studded with craft of every description, from the stately British line-of-battle ship to the little scampavia, with its red and yellow latteen sail. As we pulled up our horses beside Monte Jaci, to view the splendid prospect, the old tradition came to my remembrance:—

“The Italian shore
And fair Sicily’s coast were *one*, before
An earthquake caused the flaw: the roaring tides
The passage broke, that land from land divides;
And, where the lands retired, the rushing ocean rides.”—*Æneid*, iii.

The roaring of the sea in the cavern of Dragara caused our horses to snort and rear, and the sound was not unlike the cry of some “tremendous pest,” or monster, such as Scylla was fabled by the poets of old. But, enough, or the reader will suspect me of that “dull pedantry which finds every thing ancient necessarily sublime.”

The whole coast bore traces of that dreadful visitation, the

earthquake of 1783, when vast masses of the shore fell into the sea, burying gardens, fields, dwellings: at the base of Monte Jaci lay a mighty piece of rock, which had been hurled from its summit to the margin of the Mediterranean.

"On that night of horrors," said Castelfermo, "when all Calabria was trembling with the internal convulsions of the world—when the sea exhaled brimstone, and the whole face of the land became changed—when rivers were choked up by the fall of the mountains, or rolled back upon their source—when cities, engulfed in yawning earth, were lost for ever—when hills became lakes, and the last day of dread and judgment seemed at hand,—the ocean heaved up its waters to the height of twenty feet; and, rushing on the coast for the distance of three miles, swept back into the abyss two thousand four hundred and seventy human beings, who had fled to the shore for safety from the crumbling cliffs and falling mountains. The heavens seemed all in flames, and the ocean rolled on, wearing the red tint which the light reflected on it; the promontory of Campala fell into the waves, and not a fragment of it remained; Scylla was split to its foundations, and the solid towers of its castle flung from the rock upon the town below. The eagles screamed and grovelled, panting on the ground, whilst the wolves howled with affright in the recesses of the woods. All nature seemed convulsed, paralyzed, and trembling on the brink of destruction."

The castle was the property of Castelfermo's uncle, the Cardinal Ruffo, prince of the ancient house of Ruffo Sciglio, and a man of political and military celebrity; it was his principal residence, until ruined and dismantled on his defection; but the skill of French engineers had restored it to more than its former strength and glory. On the south side lay the snug little town, terminated by the castle rock, the cliff descending sheer down to the sea, which rolls two hundred feet below. An ample tricolour waved heavily over the dark grey keep, and the glittering arms of the sentinels flashed in the setting sun, over the ramparts and embrasures, through which protruded the muzzles of heavy cannon; their fire, during the siege, had scared away all the inhabitants of the town below.

Evening deepened around as we advanced, and we soon saw the light in the Pharo di Messina shed its tremulous rays across the rushing and now dark waters of the Strait.

The garrison of the French marquis was completely invested; on the land side, by the brigade of my countryman, Colonel (latterly, Lieutenant-General Sir John) Oswald, who, at the head of the 20th and 58th regiments, with five companies of De Watteville's corps, and two four-pound field-pieces, had marched to this part of Lower Calabria, immediately after our victory at Maida. Two days after the battle, he captured the town and castle of Monteleone, took three hundred Frenchmen prisoners, seized all the depôt there, and, pushing on by forced marches, laid siege to Scylla, which, at the time of my arrival, had been closely blockaded for nearly twenty days.

The twilight of eve had given place to the more sombre shadow of night, when we entered the town, but no chant of vespers arose from the ruined chapels of its deserted convents; soldiers alone crowded its streets and terraces, where the shattered houses, roofless and desolate, and strewn with broken furniture, exploded shells, splinters, and cannon-shot, gave evidence of the daily work of strife.

The quarters of the general were in an old mansion, the gloomy and antique aspect of which, with its vicinity to a church, declared it to have been once the residence of an ecclesiastic of rank. The jagged archivolts, twisted columns, and grotesque decorations, all displayed the peculiar taste of the Saraceno-Norman architect, who raised the massive walls of the building, which Sir John found a very comfortable shelter from the shot of the enemy's batteries.

Leaving our horses with the quarter-guard, who occupied the lower part of the building, we were ushered up a narrow well-staircase to a vaulted room, where we found Sir John and Colonel Oswald seated by a black oak table, studying a plan of Scylla, which divided their attention with an imposing jar of wine and a case of cigars.

"Welcome, Dundas," they exclaimed. "Good news, I hope? Crotona—"

"Surrendered on last Wednesday evening."

"Glorious fellow, Macleod!"

"We have taken six hundred prisoners, forty pieces of cannon, and all their stores."

"Excellent;" said the general, rubbing his hands; "and your friend—he belongs to the Free Corps, I presume?"

"Santugo's battalion. Allow me to introduce the Cavaliere di Castelermo, of the military order of Malta, who has accompanied me hither from Crotona; no easy journey, Sir John, in such a land as this. The signor is now lord of

Scylla and its castle, since the defection and consequent forfeiture of his uncle, the cardinal."

The knight and general bowed.

"We must drink your health as captain," said Oswald, filling the glasses from the greybeard, and pushing the cigars towards us, "we must also invite some of the brigade and christen your commission—eh, Dundas! Some of the cardinal's wine this—plenty more in the cellars below—(this was the house of his steward)—capital stuff, is it not?"

"And I have to congratulate the general on the rank he has obtained; long may he enjoy it!" said I, alluding to Sir John's recent elevation to the title of count of Maida, bestowed on him by Ferdinand of Naples.

Muttering an excuse, he tore open the covers, and hastily conned over the despatches of Macleod.

"Capitulated—honours of war—prisoners—um, um—I am afraid we shall not get possession of Scylla so easily. Here we have been for twenty days before this place—a mere tower with outworks—and are not nearer possession than we were at the first hour of our arrival; we have lost many valuable officers and men, and without having gained any advantage to compensate the service for their loss. Massena may advance to relieve the fortress, if the besieged do not soon yield; and Monteleone, the commandant, appears a most determined fellow; in answer to a flag of truce, he sent me his pledged word that he would fight to the last, and then blow up the place; but never surrender it."

"And this man," I observed, "is said to be a countryman of our own."

"You must not say that, Dundas," replied the general; "it is a mere rumour, I suppose."

"He is resolved to die game," said Oswald; "but Dundas, as you have some notion of these things, just look over this plan, will you, and say which you think the weakest point?"

"We were planning an assault," continued the general, "you may examine the features of the place to-morrow; but it is rather dangerous work to reconnoitre within range of their long nines and twenty-four pounders. This is a plan of the fort, sent to me by Francatipa, who found it in the baggage of a French officer killed in the massacre of Saveria; it appears to represent the place very correctly. Here is the drawbridge, there the *tête-du-pont* and fosse. You will observe, Claude, that the castle is built on the extreme verge of the cliff of Scylla, which forms the termination of a pro-

montary washed on three sides by the sea. Our friend, the Cavaliere Marco, no doubt, knows the interior well; massive walls encompass the keep, flanked by strong towers, defended by heavy cannon and mortars."

"The curtains are well loopholed for musketry, which will sweep the ditches in every direction," said Castelfermo.

"The casemates are vaulted with solid masonry," added Oswald, removing his cigar; "they are in the flanks of the bastions, and capable of containing a company each. No joke to get into a ditch, exposed to such annoyances as these, eh? They have six thirty-twos, to sweep the exterior slope of the advanced fosse, in endeavouring to cross which, Colonel Ross has lost some of the bravest fellows in the ranks of the 20th. The place is victualled amply, and watered by a cistern, and its garrison are resolute as their leader. So now what say you to all this? It has baffled the bravery of my brigade, and the skill of M. Navarro, our Italian engineer; though he comes of a stock which has achieved great things in its day."

Here the colonel pointed to a little man, clad in the scarlet Neapolitan uniform, who had hitherto sat quietly smoking a cigar behind the shadow of a column, unseen by us.

"Yes, Signor Colonello," said he, coming forward and placing a finger on the plan; "I am of opinion still, that there is nothing so effectual as a mine under that part of the wall nearest the town. I myself will volunteer to fire the saucisson."

"The place you speak of is protected by a battery of thirty-two pounders," replied the general; "you are zealous and brave, Signor Navarro, and we thank you; but a party of workmen could never form chambers in a place so rocky and exposed."

"Signor count of Maida," retorted the Italian, "I think I have served long enough to know something of mines, their capabilities and nature. My ancestor, Pietro Navarro, first introduced the noble art of springing mines, when chief engineer to the Genoese, at the siege of Serresenella, in Florence, and they gained the town by means of this branch of the art military, which is as useful as it is wonderful to behold. He also took the castle of the Egg at Naples, when serving with the Spaniards; and I held the castel dell' Ova to be stronger than the castello di Sciglio."

"Perhaps so; but our friend the marquis will take care that we do not undermine any part of his premises. Tell me, Claude what is your opinion?"

Having a little smattering of engineering, I examined the plan attentively, and found that it was almost impossible to execute Navarro's project of a mine; but by using the compasses and scale, and by an observation made when approaching the place, I discovered that the fortress was completely commanded by a neighbouring hill, by carrying guns to the scarp of which, the outer and inner defences would be easily battered, and a breach effected. It gave me no great opinion of Navarro's skill, that he had not discovered this very simple and obvious method before.

The general gave an exclamation of delight when I proposed and explained my mode of attack; but the eyes of the little Italian, of course, gleamed with malice and anger, which, for the present, he chose to conceal, although he pulled fiercely at his cigar, and kicked with his heels against the column behind him.

"Now, then, Sir John, what ordnance have you?"

"Two curricule-guns, four-pounders only; they are of little use; but Sir Sidney Smith has lent us eight thirty-sixes from his frigate, for the especial behoof of the marquis and his garrison. To drag them to the scarp of the hill is no easy task; but it shall be done, and this night, too! Scylla must be ours at all risks. Its position at the gorge of the Strait renders it of the greatest importance as a defence against shipping."

"A little Gibraltar," said Castelermo.

"And ours it shall be, if it costs us as much trouble as ever old Gib did," replied Stuart. "Hallo, Pierce!"

His orderly appeared.

"Give my compliments to Gascoigne, the brigade-major; tell him to get three officers and one hundred and fifty privates from each regiment, to drag the frigate's guns to the top of the hill yonder, where they must be in a position to open at daybreak, and desire him—or stay—I had better give you a note, perhaps."

He scribbled one hastily on the back of a guard-report, or some such valuable document; and Pierce, who had stood erect as a ramrod, raised his hand to his forehead, wheeled sharply round, as if upon a pivot, and withdrew. Immediately afterwards a bugle sounded, and in the course of ten minutes the parties went off at a rapid pace with pickaxes, srow-bars, shovels, and rcpes, the former to clear the way, and the latter to drag the cannon up the rocky, rough, and steep hill-side.

"Finish the contents of the jar, gentlemen," said Sir John,

filling Castelermo's glass, and passing the ample greybeard, "mend the fire, somebody."

Oswald gave the smoky fire-pan a kick, causing its contents to blaze up and diffuse a very little heat and a great deal of smoke through the apartment, which, like most in Italy, being without fireplace or chimney, was warmed by a panful of burning olive-husks, impregnating the atmosphere with a disagreeable odour.

"O, for the coal-fires of old England!" said the general.

"Or the snug parlour of Dunnikeir!" chimed in Oswald; thinking, doubtless, of his comfortable mansion in the east neuk of Fife.

After half an hour's conversation, maintained principally by myself, in describing the journey from Crotona, we adjourned to the scene of operations, where four hundred and fifty soldiers were toiling along a narrow and rugged road, dragging the heavy guns from the beach towards the mountain.

"Beware of that little fellow, Navarro!" said Castelermo, tapping me on the shoulder; "he regards you with no friendly eye, for the *exposé* you made of his ignorance. He is Sicilian bred, and the Sicilians are slippery dogs."

A party provided with hatchets, pickaxes, and spades, moved in front, and cleared the way by cutting down trees and hedges, levelling walls and fences, and removing all obstacles to the progress of those who brought the cannon; some pulling the ropes attached to the clumsy ship-carriages, whilst others urged the little creaking wheels by applying crow-bars behind. It was a task equally slow and laborious; but the officers, with proper zeal, set an example to the soldiers, by sharing in the toil, and working among them without their coats. On the hill, all traces of road or track had disappeared, and thickets of olives, wild vines, ruined walls, masses of sandstone, ruts, and gorges, obstructed the way so much, that the hour of two in the morning arrived, ere the guns were posted and ready for service.

Our little party of artillery, assisted by some of the infantry of the line, had them loaded, depressed, and prepared to open fire, the instant day began to brighten the Straits of Messina.

Meanwhile, the marquis and his garrison were not idle; by the noise in the town below, they became aware that something unusual was going on, and blue-balls were burned on every battlement and pinnacle, until all Scylla seemed wrapped in livid flames; a ghastly glare lighted up the ocean to the

west, and the mountains to the east; the clouds above us floated in sulphury blue, and even the spires of Fiumara and Messina glimmered in the cold, unearthly lustre shed from those lofty ramparts. The castle was so distinctly revealed, that we could have counted every stone in the massive keep, and every bar in the grated windows; but the night was so dark as effectually to conceal our operations. They fired a few rounds of shot and shell at random, killing a few of the guards who blocked up the avenues of the place, but otherwise without effect; and I have no doubt they were a little disconcerted, when dawning day revealed to them eight thirty-sixes on the mountain-side, and opposed to the weakest part of their works. A commotion was immediately observable among them, and a still greater one when, on firing our first salvo, a mass of the outer bastion, above the cordon, fell into the ditch below.

Encouraged by this, our artillerymen plied the cannon with might and main, working in their shirt-sleeves (it was a broiling morning); but, after an hour's firing, the cannonades became heated, and began to "kick" and recoil so much, that they were compelled to cease operations for a time, and permit them to cool,—a process which the French usually facilitate by introducing sponges steeped in vinegar, when it can be had, which is not often, on service.

The gallant garrison strove hard to interrupt these successful operations; but as we were rather beyond the range of musketry, and their battery-guns could not be pointed to such an elevation as that on which we were situated, they had recourse to mortars; these, however, were so ill-managed, that the bombs generally fell short, and either sank into the turf, or rolled down the hill to the sea-shore, and exploded among the breakers.

When again our battery opened, we heard the French band playing the old republican *carmagnole*—a piece of mere gasconade.

"I will bet a dozen of wine we change their tune in an hour," said the general, who was watching the operations through his telescope. "We will humble them yet."

"Ha! what can that be?" I exclaimed; "a sortie?"

"No; but the devil seems to have jumped over the castle-wall into the town below," said Oswald. An unusual bustle took place amongst our soldiers, who were seen running through the streets in confusion, and exposed to the enemy's musketry, which instantly opened on them.

An enormous carcass, 230 pounds weight, had been blown

from a mortar into Scylla, with the intention of setting it on fire. The combustibles which compose this amiable engine of modern warfare, are pitch, tallow, powder, saltpetre, oil, broken barrels of muskets, loaded grenades, bars of iron, chains, and broken bottles, all hooped together in one globular mass; through these, fuse-holes are bored, and to which lighted matches are applied the moment before the bomb is shot forth.

This ponderous affair descended through the roof of the general's temporary quarter, where, luckily, there was no wood-work to burn,—but the house was shattered to its foundations, unroofed, and blown to ruins in a moment.

"Basta!" exclaimed Cavaliere Marco, as the carcass exploded, without doing further harm; "a rare fellow is this marchese! He will fight to the death-gasp, I warrant; and Scylla will never fall while his hand can hold a sabre."

"Then we will leave the castle in a worse predicament than the earthquake left it," replied Sir John, closing his telescope sharply.

"You may blow it into the sea, for aught that I care, gentlemen," said the Italian; "its late lord, my uncle, was ever a niggard of his ducats to me, and I have no great love for his old house. Many an unhappy heretic and infidel has perished in the obscurity of its dungeons. I know something of them. Will you believe it, Signor Claude? the old bashaw once lodged me in them for a week, because I interfered with his friendship for a certain fair damsel of Reggio: cardinals are not to be trifled with!"

"Well, sir," said the general, "you may join the assault to-night, if the breach is practicable." The eyes of the brave cavalier sparkled.

"With heart and hand, excellency! I bear as much hatred to our foes in Scylla, as a Christian man may bear to others. They are the false, tyrannical, and oppressive French! I have not forgotten that when Napoleon's fleet appeared off Malta, the knights of Provence, Auvergne, and all the French langue, abandoned the banner of the order, instead of fighting like L'Isle Adam of old, as long as stone wall and steel blade remained true to them."

The general bowed, and smiled slightly at the Italian's enthusiasm.

"Thank Heaven, the carcass did no more damage," said he; "the effect of one, properly shot, is indeed tremendous. I saw one fired when Moore took the Mozzello fort. Ah'

Dundas, it was your poor brother, Frank and I, who led on the stormers there; he was a brave and dashing fellow, and would have been a glory to his profession, but for that dog of a German—Kranz."

Before sunset a tolerable breach was effected in that part of the bastions next the town; and by way of filling up the interval of time till dusk, our battery played on the keep with such success that a great part of the wall repaired by the French fell down, and thus weakened the fort considerably. But the marchese kept his soldiers steadily at work the whole day, although exposed to our fire; and, with billets and fascines, endeavoured, in the usual manner, to repair the breaches; they, however, were reported fully practicable by the officer in charge of the battery, and at eleven o'clock that night an assault was ordered to take place.

END OF FIRST SERIES.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FORLORN-HOPE.

At sunset the following notice was circulated:—

"Brigade Orders.—Officers desirous of leading the forlorn-hope are requested to send in their names, without delay, to Brigade-Major Gascoigne."

After turning over this invitation in my mind for some time, and weighing the chances of promotion against those of escape, I resolved not to send in my card to Gascoigne, notwithstanding that longing for fame and distinction—a secret craving to be the first man among the multitude, which, in fact, is the true sentiment that makes us buckle on the sword at first; but to lead a forlorn-hope is to throw away one's life.

Just when the troops were getting silently under arms in a sheltered place, near an old, gloomy, and empty convent, I went to the rallying-post. The spirited cavaliere di Casteltermo earnestly requested the general to allow him the honour of heading the dangerous enterprise; but his services, his high courage and birth, and his commander's cross, availed him nothing in the present instance. Sir John politely thanked him, and hinted, as delicately as he could, that a British officer alone could lead where British soldiers were to follow.

"Signor Count," replied the Italian, bitterly, "there was a time when the cross of St. John was valued more highly—when its wearers *followed* none, but alone led the way. It has pleased Fate to try us sorely, like the Templars of other days: we have been deprived of our ships, our castles, and our possessions, of all but our name and glory; yet I trust there is a time to come when once more the banner of Malta will be what it was—what it has been ever since the accursed Mussulmans captured Rhodes, the shield of the Christian mariner, and the terror of the African barbarian!"

The restoration of his order to all its chivalric glory and military power, was one of Casteltermo's darling themes, and one about which he bored me for many a long hour. Poor Marco! he was doomed never to behold the

realization of those gay visions of his bold and heroic fancy.

"Yet, signor," he continued, "if I cannot lead in the assault, I will endeavour to be the second man within the breach."

"Young Morley, of the 20th, has sent in his name," said Gascoigne, who at that moment approached, with a number of notes in his hand.

"The little fool!" muttered the general; "poor boy—he has seen little enough of life yet, to be in such a hurry to quit it. Does he lead the stormers?"

"No—Dundas, of ours," replied Gascoigne, who was a 62nd man. "So you mean to lead 'the lost children' to-night," he added to me.

"No, 'faith! a company is not got every day, and——"

"Your name is on my list as a volunteer, though!"

"The deuce it is!" I exclaimed, gravely; "I never sent it to you."

"Amazing!" said he, handing me a note, written in a hand and signed with a signature so like my own—having every blot, turn, and dash—that I was confounded and nonplussed.

"I never penned this note, gentlemen! Never! I pledge my honour; it is a forgery, to lead me into unnecessary danger."

"Singular!" said the brigade-major, puzzled.

"'Tis the roguery of Navarro," whispered Marco; "I will wager a hundred crowns to a carlino, this is a piece of his revenge."

"Dundas, there is no time for inquiry or exposure just now," said Colonel Oswald. "What do you propose—to withdraw your name?"

"No, I will lead the assault; and to-morrow, if I survive, shall expose this cowardly Sicilian forger, who is a disgrace to the uniform he wears," said I, exasperated to find myself compelled, in honour, to undertake this most perilous and deadly duty, where the chances of escape with life were as one to a hundred, without the glorious credit of being a willing volunteer.

"Fall in—the stormers," cried Gascoigne.

"Gentlemen—to your posts," cried Sir John, and I was left almost alone. The time of attack was so close at hand, that luckily I had little time for reflection, yet, for a few minutes, I became grave and melancholy enough.

Life, death, home, Bianca, wounds and agony, all floated in confusion before me ; but these misgivings were stifled, and a chivalric recklessness—a desperate hope—a glow of courage that would make one face the devil, took possession of my breast, when the stormers, two hundred in number, selected from volunteers of the 20th, threw off their knapsacks, blankets, and canteens, and were handed over to me by their adjutant. For my heavy cocked-hat, with its long staff plumes, I substituted a light foraging-cap ; for my tasselled hessians, a pair of large jack-boots. I buckled my waist-belt tighter, examined the blade and hilt of my sword, threw away my cigar, and gave the word—

“Attention ! Mr. Morley you will inspect the rear-rank.”

The pouches were opened, the flints and ammunition examined by the light of the diamond-like stars ; the orders to fix bayonets, and load with ball-cartridge, followed. The ramrods went home on the charges with a sullen, muffled sound, the muskets rattled, and then the ranks became motionless and still. The bell of some distant campanile tolled the eleventh hour, and as the sound floated away, I could hear my own heart beating, through all its thickening pulses.

My subaltern, poor lad, looked very pale ; I could perceive it by the starlight.

“Morley !” I whispered, in a tart tone of surprise.

“I am thinking of my mother—she is far away, at home,” he faltered, and, colouring deeply, added, “I cannot help these thoughts.”

“Few of us will hear twelve strike,” thought I, whilst closing the ranks, and lowering the point of my sabre to the general, to intimate that we were ready.

“Success to you, Dundas,” said he. “Move on by sections ; you know the breach—at the top, the main street. The fellows begin to scent our purpose already. You will be ably supported ; Oswald, with the 58th ; Ross, with the 20th ; De Watteville’s corps is the reserve. Forward !”

We moved off, and at the same moment the French guns again opened on the town, worked with renewed energy and rapidity. The rock of Scylla was shaken to its sea-worn foundations, and the lights, flashing from battlement and embrasure, revealed the parapets lined

with stern faces and bristling bayonets, the lofty keep crowded with men, and its giant outline towering over the whirling smoke which issued from the guns of the lower works.

The windings of the shore, the peak of Monte Jaci, and the caverns below us, rang with continual discharges of the artillery, and the intervals were filled by the roar of the seething surf, and its booming in the yawning depths of Dragara, where—

“ Scylla bellows from her dire abodes !
Tremendous pest ! abhorred by men and gods !
Hideous her voice, and with less terror roar
The whelps of lions in the midnight hour.”

Odyssey, book xii.

The night was close and still ; the frequent flashes of the fire-arms reddened the gathered clouds, and lightened the bosom of the ocean : the scene was grand and impressive. But we had very little poetry in our hearts as we stumbled up the rough, dark street, over which the thirty-twos and long nines whistled incessantly, one moment dealing death and mutilation amongst us, and the next bringing some ruined gable or ponderous balcony thundering down on our perilous line of march. With the utmost speed we pressed forward, while Oswald followed with his corps, and without much loss we passed the houses, and debouched upon the ridge, when the whole outline of the fortress burst at once upon our view. We rushed forward to the breach under a tremendous fire, which rained from every parapet, point, and loophole. Magnificent and terrible was the aspect of the castle at that moment ; once more, innumerable blue lights shed their livid and sepulchral glare on town and fortress, land and sea, enabling the defenders to direct their fire steadily upon us. The musketry rolled in one voluminous blaze over breastwork and palisade, while the batteries played with incessant rapidity, loading the air with the sound of thunder, for the echoes, thrown back by the hills, were redoubled by the resounding caverns of the rock. From the summit of the keep to the lower walls, every point seemed to swarm with men, and was either blazing with light or shadowed by smoke, and bristling with lines of flashing steel.

Before us lay the breach, foredoomed to be the death-bed of many ; it was an immense mass of loose stones

and the ascent to it was most troublesome, with such obstacles as we had to contend with. Fascines and chevaux-de-frise were thrown across the gap, and in rear of this crowded the garrison, who were firing on us with deadly coolness and precision.

Morley fell dead at my feet! An indescribable sensation—a kind of frenzy, possessed me. I shouted and rushed up, brandishing my sabre, and holding aloft in my left hand the little standard, which I had undertaken to place on the walls of Scylla, or die in the attempt; it was blown to ribands by the storm of balls. Navarro was forgotten; I thought only of glory and Bianca!

“Forward, 20th! Remember Egmont! On, on! Hurrah!”

“Hurrah! hurrah!” cried the wild stormers, as they scrambled up the breach in a mob, encumbered by the killed and wounded, who were falling every second under their feet. A shower of hand-grenades, thrown by the grenadiers of the 20th, who were posted in rear of a low wall close by, drove the enemy back from the chevaux-de-frise, and shattered it to pieces. These military engines, which are now most unaccountably laid aside, were followed by a few round shot from our battery; their discharge created great confusion among the French; so much so, that we reached the summit of the breach without suffering half the slaughter I had anticipated.

A new engine was now brought into operation, the effect of which will never be forgotten by me while life and memory remain.

“Push on, for God’s sake! O, my brave fellows! trust now to the bayonet, and the bayonet only!” I cried.

“Viva Ferdinando nostro e la Santa Fede!” shouted Castelfermo, springing to my side, but the Calabrian war-cry was almost lost in the cheers of the 20th, and the terrific din around us; the ear was stunned with one continual roar of frightful sounds. But the groan, the stifled gasp, the agonizing cry were unheard or unheeded; we made the corpses of our dearest comrades stepping-stones, and through the shot and shell-splinters, which swept around us like a hail-storm, we rushed on, to close, to grapple with, and overwhelm the enemy. At their head we perceived the marquis, a noble-looking fellow, on whose broad breast the stars and medals of his achieve-

ments were shining in the light from the muskets and bursting bombs.

At that instant I reached the summit of the breach, and laid my hand on the chevaux-de-frise, to vault over, when the earth heaved and yawned beneath our feet; a tremendous explosion and a dreadful crash ensued; a hundred of my party were blown to atoms in a moment, and I was thrown over the barrier, falling headlong in the midst of the enemy.

Unseen by us, after dusk, a *caisson des bombes*, or tub filled with loaded shells, had been secretly sunk under the stones of the breach, and being slightly covered over by fragments of masonry, lay concealed until the moment we trod upon it, when the French fired it by means of a saucisson, and produced a frightful catastrophe. There was a pause for a moment, but a moment only.

The few survivors of the storming party recoiled, and I saw Castelfermo clinging with all the desperation of a dying man to a copingstone of the shattered battlement. The stone yielded and gave way; there was a cry of "Basta!" and the poor knight vanished, but whether into the fosse or the sea beneath the cliffs, I knew not; in either case, I was sure he must have perished.

A yell of triumph burst from the French; it was echoed by one of defiance from our stormers, who once more rushed forward, led on by Colonel Oswald. His tall and stately figure afforded a prominent mark for the fire of the besieged; but he miraculously escaped. With all the courage that desperation could inspire, I used my sabre among the French, with a strength and energy they were unaccustomed to; but my efforts to clear the barrier and rejoin our stormers were perfectly ineffectual. At the very moment that Oswald sprang, sword in hand, over the now shattered blades of the chevaux-de-frise, followed by the 20th, thirsting for vengeance, I received a blow from the butt of a musket, and felt as if crushed beneath the weight of a mountain; the light of a thousand stars seemed to dance before me; then all was dark, horribly dark! My God! I faltered, and sank to the earth; the French, supposing me dead, trod over me as they rushed forward to the conflict.

The fatal breach was now passed, and our soldiers fought like lions, to retain their ground within it. The conflict was maintained, hand to hand, with resolute

valour; swords and ponderous musket-butts were whirling about like sticks at Donnybrook fair.

My head swam with the effects of the blow; yet I contrived to crawl from among the legs of the French—whose red breeches and leather leggings I shall not soon forget—and drew near Oswald. Then starting up, half-blinded with blood, smoke, and confusion, I rushed upon the French commandant. I had not exchanged half a dozen passes with him, ere a heavy dizziness came over me; I staggered backwards, and, sinking, clung to a cannon for support. He had raised his sabre aloft to cleave my head in two; but, like a gallant soldier as he was, he spared me, and engaged Oswald, in whom he found no common adversary; for the colonel was stout of heart and strong of hand as any nail-supper that ever came out of the famous “kingdom” of Fife.

Short but desperate was the combat that ensued; a stroke across the temple laid the famous marchese, whose name was so terrible to the Neapolitans, prostrate before his conqueror; and he was trodden to the earth among the gory corpses which cumbered the breach, while the whole 58th, with their black standards in front, swept over us.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RENCONTRE!

As all our impetuous troops had now passed through the breach, the French were driven beyond it; but the conflict raged with undiminished fury in other parts of the fortress. The place where I had fallen, benumbed and bruised, was comparatively quiet and still, and whilst I lay there, I heard a voice close by me exclaim, in pure English, “O, my God! and here end all my hopes, my joys, and sorrows! My mother—my home—I shall never see them more! Alas! the one would weep for, the other scorn me! Aloise—dearest Aloise! we meet no more! Well, I have ever been faithful to you, and to our emperor. You have ever been loving, and my sovereign grateful.”

Turning with surprise, I found it was the French commandant who was thus soliloquizing, whilst he bled profusely from a wound, which disfigured him very much.

"Here is a stout Briton who has been fighting under the tricolor, or some wild spirit that has fled from Ireland after the last rising," I thought, whilst approaching him on my hands and knees. I tied up his head with my handkerchief, to stanch the blood—though I myself needed the same attention—and on dividing the contents of my pocket-flask between us, the commandant recovered wonderfully.

"Sir, you have betrayed yourself to be British!" said I, in a low, stern voice. "With me your secret is safe; I respect you as a brave man, and should have done so still more had you been a Frenchman; but beware how you become known to Sir John Stuart; he is a stern soldier of the old school, who will assuredly order a drum-head court-martial, and have you shot as a traitor!"

The eyes of the marquis flashed fire.

"I am now a soldier of fortune," he replied, "free to serve where and whom I please. Stuart, if he knew all—if he remembered. But there is a secret spirit whispering at this moment within me, that I have met you before; you are the officer who led the forlorn-hope?" His voice faltered.

"Yes."

"And whom I encountered in the breach, before that tall officer cut me down?"

"The same."

"O, fate! if it should be so," he exclaimed, passing his hand across his blood-stained brow; and then grasping me with energy, "your name, sir?"

"Dundas," said I; "Claude Dundas."

"Of the 62nd foot?" His eyes were now starting in his head, so intensely he gazed on me.

"Yes, sir," I replied sharply, "I am not ashamed to acknowledge myself."

"Taunt me not—taunt me not!" he exclaimed, wildly; "God! I am your brother—I am Frank, who was dismissed from the Corsicans so unjustly. This hour—this agony—my wound—O say, in ten years, have you quite forgotten my features?"

For a moment I regarded, with wonder, his bronzed and bearded visage, now covered with blood; then, appalled by his words, I endeavoured to trace in his features those of the fair-haired and light-hearted boy who used to carry me on his back to school, and was my champion and pre-

teetor in many a fisticuff battle and bicker, who was so often flogged by the grim old janitor for taking my faults and blunders on himself, and for whom I wept like a girl through many a long weary night, when, as a stripling ensign, he joined the army under the good duke of York, and first fired my boyish ardour by being gazetted for his valour at Valenciennes.

For a time, memory carried me back to the pleasant days of our childhood, and my heart, which a moment before had been strung for stirring deeds of carnage and death, relaxed and melted within me ; in that terrible hour, in the gory breach of Scylla, surrounded by the dying and dead, with the uproar of the assault yet sounding above and around me, I threw away my sabre, and weeping, as I had done in my boyish days, embraced that brother over whom all believed the grave had closed, and whom I had never expected to meet again on earth.

"Happy as I am to meet you, Frank, I would rather that we had never met, than that I should meet you thus. The French uniform——"

"Is that of as brave an army as the sun shines on !" he replied, enthusiastically. "Insulted pride, necessity, and revenge, forced me into its ranks, where I have served faithfully and honourably, as the high civil and military rank I have attained, together with these badges, received some of them from Napoleon's hand on the Champ de Mars, and some on the battle-fields of Holland and Italy, can amply testify. Our mother," he added, in a broken voice, "tell me, our mother——"

"Lives still, but old and sorrowing."

"And Kranz—my evil genius?"

"Dead—shot at St. Eufemio."

"There ends our enmity," he replied, through his set teeth. "I have gained a rank infinitely above that from which he degraded me. Heaven knows how my heart bled when first I found myself opposed to the ranks of your army at Maida ; the well-known colours and red-coats—ay, even my own old regiment, the gallant Rangers, whose officers and men, all save one, had been my comrades through many a perilous day. O, it was an hour of acute and indescribable agony when I saw them marching by the Amato in close column, with their band in front, playing the same merry quickstep to which I had often marched in happier days. I have found the French

as honourable as they are brave; and, could I have forgotten home, should have been supremely happy in their service. My marriage with Aloise Milette, daughter of the general of division—you must have heard of him—would have given me additional ties to France. Alois—ah! if you knew her, Claude;” he paused, as if to collect his scattered thoughts, and then, although his senses were wandering, continued:—

“This last stronghold of the emperor in the Calabrias, I have defended to the last—yes, with all my power and courage; and in this moment of extremity I must not desert my brave fellows, while a chance remains of driving Oswald’s brigade through the breach or into the sea. Farewell! God bless you, Claude! Speak kindly of me to those at home—to my poor mother—she will never see me more.”

He strained me for a moment to his breast, and snatching up his notched sabre, staggered towards that part of the works where an unequal contest was maintained by a section of Frenchmen, whom our soldiers were endeavouring in vain to dislodge from a bomb-proof vault, by firing in through the same loopholes from which the enemy dealt death so securely.

“Vive l’Empereur!” he exclaimed, rushing towards them with his brandished sabre.

“Frank!” I cried; “Frank, by the memory of all that has passed!—for the love of God—hear me!” But he heard me not. He had scarcely advanced a dozen paces, when a shot—whether aimed or fired at random, I know not—passed through his head, and flattened on a gun-breech beside me. He fell dead across a heap of his own men, and never moved again. A cry of horror rose to my lips, but expired upon them unuttered. Stupified with the events of the night, my brain whirled, and I sank down on the slippery and bloody pavement of the inner bastion; my mind was a fearful chaos, and I experienced a sensation like that of a horrible nightmare.

Weak as a child, and quite unmanned, bitter tears rolled over my cheeks. A dead man lay across me; I was half-stified, but could not move. I thought of home; and the splashing of the waves far below me sounded like the murmur of my native Esk: again I heard in imagination, the ripple of its waters tinkling in Roslin’s lonely glen; the woods of Dalkeith rustled over me. Frank’s last words yet rang in my ears, but it seemed the familiar voice of a

boy; then came that of my mother, low and sad—she was weeping for her son. Again, I was a child, and her kiss was on my cheek. Salt and hot were the tears I shed, and bitter the agony I endured, ere blessed unconsciousness possessed me, and sinking back against the gun-slide, I swooned among the bodies of the dead.

* * * * *

Long ere this, the place had been taken. Infuriated by the protracted assault, our men burst over the fortress like a torrent. De Watteville's soldiers were like madmen. Woe to the officer who dared to check their plundering, or curb their fury!—and woe to the unhappy women who fell into their power! Innumerable episodes of horror followed the conclusion of the storm. The French, who had been disarmed, were marched instantly to the beach, and embarked on board Sir Sidney's squadron; which had come close in shore on hearing the noise of the attack.

No time was to be lost in making Scylla again defensible; therefore, before daybreak, the dead were all interred in a common grave, in a hollow near Monte Jaci. For one amongst the hundreds thus buried, I desired a separate and more secluded sepulchre; but, stripped of his epaulettes and orders, *his* body, without being recognized, had been hurried away, and entombed with the common herd in that dreadful grave, over which two hundred soldiers hurled the earth, for concealment of the ghastly heaps within it. I remember the place; an orange-tree, of gigantic size, shadowed it; and a ruined Grecian column may yet point it out to the tourist; it was lying near, and our soldiers placed it over the grave.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

REGGIO.—AN IMPROVISATORE.

WHILE I was still lying where I had sunk down exhausted—stunned by my wound, appalled by the recent discovery, weak with pain and loss of blood, and utterly prostrated in spirit—the fortress became still, or comparatively so, and the objects all around were veiled in darkness: the blue lights had burned out, and the lurid gleam of the cannon and musketry no longer flashed through the gloom. Cries and piteous exclamations of

agony resounded from every quarter ; and the living were dragged from beneath heaps of dead, to be sent to the hospital—an old, half-ruined convent, which was appropriated to receive the wounded ; but which was soon found to be inadequate to contain them.

Three soldiers employed in searching for those who needed relief approached me ; one of them bore a lantern, and its light glared on the once gay, but now tattered, uniform of Castelermo, who accompanied them, and whose fate I had altogether forgotten.

"Basta ! and here he is !" he exclaimed ; "only stunned, I hope.—How now, Signor Capitano ?—nothing more than a few inches of the skin ripped up ?"

"A cloven head, only," I replied, in a faint voice.

"Only !" he reiterated.

"An old wound broken out again. I was struck by a musket-butt on the very place where a ball grazed my head at Cefalu. But I am glad to see you alive and scatheless, after that sad tumble you had, when blown out of the breach."

"I have indeed had an escape which, to my dying day, will never be forgotten. I fell only into the fosse ; but a yard more, on one side, would have launched me into the deep ; and, by this time, I should have been—Madonna knows where, in the depths of 'devouring Scylla.' Never shall I forget the storming of this castle, though I should live as long as father Adam."

The soldiers raised me up, and, on receiving the assistance of Castelermo's arm, I was able to walk, and was led into the interior of the castle ; where, after guards had been posted, one party of the conquerors was making merry on the wine, brandy, and viands found in the French stores. Another party was already bearing away the dead, for interment ; they were so numerous, that the general deemed it prudent, in so hot a climate, to have the poor fellows all under the turf by sunrise. The taking of the place had been attended with considerable slaughter ; but I have forgotten the exact casualties.

For several days after the assault, our troops were occupied in repairing the old defences, building new ones, remounting cannon, burying the stray corpses, which were sometimes found in retired nooks and corners, and in attending to the wounded ; whilst I remained inactive on the list of the convalescents. To me, these were days of

indescribable misery and *ennui*; I endured agony, both of mind and body; for a wound on the head, dangerous at all times, is doubly so in a warm climate. I became feverish and restless, and was haunted by gloomy visions and fancies.

The assault—its dangers, uproar, and excitement—that unexpected and terrible rencontre—the voice—the face—the words—the figure, which seemed to come to me from the grave, to appear only, and be lost for ever—all flitted continually before me, like some hideous dream. I brooded over the secret, which I dared not reveal even to my most intimate friends in the garrison; and it oppressed and weighed upon me like some vast incubus. I was restless, unhappy, and careless of all that was passing around me; or, if I spent a thought on the external world, it was always accompanied by a wish to be again engaged on some piece of active service.

Oswald being the officer who fairly led the stormers through the breach, I did not receive promotion; but, in lieu, a riband with a silver clasp, having the word *Scylla* inscribed on it, was presented to me. This I considered no ordinary compliment; rewards for merit being—strange to say—almost unknown in the British service; if we except those rings worn on the arms of the privates, and called “good-conduct stripes,” in contradistinction to the *bad*, which are bestowed elsewhere.

My name was duly emblazoned in the general orders, and transmitted to the Horse Guards, whence the reiterated compliments of the commander-in-chief were published through all the journals of the day; and while, in my obscure billet at Scylla, I knew nothing about it, I was becoming quite a man of note at home.

As soon as the fall of the fortress became known, the inhabitants of the town, whom the din of war had driven to Reggio and Messina, came flocking back to their ruined and rifled habitations; and the picturesque little place soon resumed its wonted appearance of life and activity, which the presence of Oswald's brigade, and the vicinity of our fleet, not a little increased.

I had a tolerably comfortable billet with an ancient lady, who did all in her power to make me happy; for she perceived that something weighed heavily on my spirits, and that I was gloomy and melancholy. She was a garrulous old gossip, whose head was then as full of

saints and miracles as it had been of love and lovers thirty years before, and a famous maker of polenta and choko-priest, with which she often nearly choked me; but old Signoressa Pisa was so kind and motherly in her manner, that I have ever since remembered her with gratitude.

The little town and its castle were crowded to excess; the latter with Oswald's brigade, and the former with its returned inhabitants, our own wounded, and those of the enemy. There was not a closet, garret, or cellar unoccupied; and Castelermo shared with me the hospitality of Signora Pia. Our quarters could not be called billets, as each person housed himself where he could; the seniors generally occupying the best, by right of rank.

From the windows of my apartment, we had a noble view of the Straits, studded with vessels, and gleaming in blue and saffron by day, and in silver and green by night; the white-terraced houses and spires of Messina, the beautiful mountains, and all the Sicilian shore. In the evening, I often enjoyed the cool prospect and a fragrant cigar, while sipping the scanty half-pint of ration wine, to which the medical officer restricted me, and listening to the dashing of the waves on the cliffs below. The little library of the signora was placed at my disposal; but the "Gierusalemme," the "Hundred Ancient Tales," the poems of Alfieri, and the sayings and doings of many holy personages, were all turned over listlessly; until, at last, I found one volume which interested me deeply. It was one of which I had heard Bianca speak most rapturously, and which all Italians mention with admiration—the Poems of Ossian, the Bard of Selma, which are so ably translated by the celebrated poet Cesarotti, whose pen has added an essay on their authenticity and beauty, which the Italians can appreciate, even through the medium of a second translation. From Napoleon—who is said never to have been without a copy of this work, especially when writing bulletins and general orders—the Abate Cesarotti received a handsome pension. The book afforded me occupation during the few weeks I remained at Scylla. I say weeks, because Ossian is not a work to be skimmed, but rather studied; every line is so replete with power and beauty. But my quiet mode of life was not fated to last long, as I was sent on duty the moment my name was off the staff-surgeon's list.

As soon as I could ride, I ordered out Cartonche, and,

accompanied by Casteltermo, rode over to Reggio, in faint hope of beholding that famous phenomenon, the *Fata Morgana*—the sea fairy, as our padrona called her—who, according to the Calabrese tradition, is a mermaid dwelling in the Straits of Messina, above the waves of which she displays her palaces of shell and coral, to lure young men to destruction; but there are fairies in all the cities of Italy, whose lures are more dangerous than those of the poor mermaid in the fable.

Casteltermo informed me that he had been hearing mass at a chapel of San Bartolommeo, among the hills, where he had solemnly returned thanks to the great patron of his order, for his narrow escape at Scylla.

"And San Bartolommeo, who was he?" I asked.

"A most blessed saint, signor. To-day is the anniversary of his martyrdom: he was flayed alive, by order of Astiages, the Armenian. But my escape—*maladetto!* 'twas a narrow one: when my hold relaxed, and I fell from the broken battlement, I thought myself gone for ever. Yea, signor, but for St. John of Malta, and the beatified Madonna, I must have been dashed to pieces on those stone flags, which received me so softly: in all my campaigns under the cardinal, in all my fighting under the winged horse at Rome, and the Maltese flag, I never encountered an adventure equal to it!"

"Under the Maltese flag? Against the Turks, I presume?"

"Basta! ay, and corsairs of Barbary, pirates of Greece, and, lastly, Frenchmen. You are aware, that three months after the soldiers of Napoleon captured that solitary rock, where the banner of the true faith had waved so long, the hereditary vassals of the order, irritated by the tyranny of his general, Vaubois, rose in arms: with a few knights of the old Italian langue, I hastened to put myself at their head, and assist in the expulsion of those irreligious invaders. Ha! then we had something like war. The gates of Valetta, and the other cities of the isle, were shut, and their blockaded garrison reduced to the utmost famine and distress. Then ensued that long and bloody siege, which lasted for two years, during which time more than twenty thousand soldiers perished by the sword or starvation. As the great master-spirit of those military operations, I was in my glory, and was full of fervour, rapture, and ecstasy, at the prospect of once more establishing my

order. No pilgrim, on first beholding the holy city from afar, ever experienced the glow of indescribable feeling which possessed me, when the fleet of Portugal, sent by Lord Nelson to our assistance, burst joyously on my gaze,—as the gallant ships, with their frowning tiers of artillery, their standards streaming, and white canvas swelling in the breeze, steered round the promontory, and opened their broadsides against the castle of St. Elmo. O, hour of joy! I kissed my sword, and raised my hands to the blue sky above me, in thankfulness. Lastly, came the fleets of Britain and Sicily, after which the fortresses surrendered, and the soldiers of Vaubois, marching to the sea-shore, threw down their arms. All the treasured hopes, the glowing thoughts of years, were about to be accomplished: I stepped forward, to receive the sword of the general; judge of my wrath, when Lord Nelson anticipated me; bowing low, Vaubois presented his sword by the hilt, and the admiral immediately handed it to a short, squat fellow, a sailor, who stood behind, and who, with the most provoking indifference and *sang froid*, put it under his arm, with those of other officers, as he received them in succession."

Castelermo heaved a deep sigh, paused, and then continued:—"I had in my hands the same consecrated standard which Ximenes, our most illustrious grand-master, had, in better days, unfurled against the infidels of Algeria; I was about to hoist it on the ramparts of Valetta, and at the point of the sword claim the isle in the name of the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, when lo! the British flag was hoisted on the turrets of St. Elmo: a cold shivering seized my frame, while my heart glowed with honest indignation at the grasping nature of England. Slowly the flag ascended, unrolling its gaudy crosses to the breeze, when the cheers of the troops, mingling with those of our fickle and perfidious vassals, were echoed back by the shipping of the allies in our harbour, and the Sicilians thundered a salute from the bastions of Ricasoli. I thought of old Villiers de l'Isle Adam, of Diomedes, of John de Valette, and the glories that had passed away for ever. Sick at heart, and disgusted with the world, I tossed into the sea beneath me the banner of Ximenes, and, sheathing my sword, quitted for ever the isle of Malta, where for two long years I had fought, toiled, and bled, animated by the proud and chivalric hope, that, by

restoring to its pristine grandeur the order of St. John, I should live in story, like those brave warriors who shine in the glowing pages of Vertot. But, alas ! we are falling now, as the Templars fell of old."

I never interrupted him : the departed glories of his order formed a sad but favourite theme, and he continued to dwell upon it until we arrived at Reggio. The white houses of the town, the undulating hills, palm-groves, and orangeries, formed a very agreeable landscape, sloping down to the glassy bosom of the dark-blue ocean.

"And this is Rhegium, so celebrated in the history of the past."

"Where guilty Circé trod the waves with feet unwetted, and where the wild warriors of Barbarossa gave all to fire and sword," said the cavaliere, as we rode over ground strewn with ruins, now rapidly becoming hidden under luxuriant masses of ivy and vine. "These shattered walls bear traces of the great earthquake of 1783, which will never be forgotten until some still greater calamity overwhelms all Calabria with destruction and horror."

"The Grecian columns yonder——"

"Are the relics of an earlier age—fragments of the great temple of Minerva. Reggio was once famous for its country villas ; of those you behold only the ruins, which are used as a common quarry by the people ; and here you will look in vain for the city, once so famed for its extent and opulence ; but the sacking and burning of 1544, the convulsion of 1783, and succeeding wars and woes, have reduced it to what you now see."

Though some of its streets were new and handsome, they were quiet as those of a sequestered hamlet at home : impoverished and oppressed by the invaders, their inhabitants were few, and those poor and dejected in appearance. The scenery, however, was beautiful ; the winding shores, the dark waters of the Straits, the high mountains of the purest green, and the variously-tinted groves of aromatic trees, all combined to render the place charming. The smooth bosom of the glassy sea vividly reflected the landscape ; but we looked in vain for that wondrous phenomenon, the Fairy Morgana, who was so condescending, a few years before, as to display her coral palaces thrice to the Dominican, Frà Antonio Minaci. Less favoured by the fair mermaid, we beheld neither inverted fleets nor

submarine cities, and, after a canter along the *Murina*, adjourned to the *Café Britannica* to dine.

In the evening, as we sat sipping our wine at the open windows, enjoying the cool west wind from the Straits, and observing the passers-by,—for the streets became a little more animated, as the men turned out to smoke their cigars and talk politics, the women to see them and promenade,—a crowd beneath the balcony attracted our attention.

‘An improvisatore,’ said Castelfermo, as the notes of a guitar were heard. ‘Shall I give him a theme?’

‘Certainly: but what shall it be? The Fall of Rhodes?’

‘You shall hear: the Capture of Scylla.’

He drew a card from his case, wrote something on the back of it with a pencil, and threw it over the balcony. In the midst of the crowd stood a young man, in the common but graceful garb of the province, with a broad, scarlet riband encircling his hat, the front of which was adorned by a loyalist cockade of the same hue. His jacket of green plush was gaily embroidered, a broad white shirt-collar was folded over it, yellow cotton breeches, a green silk sash and leather gaiters finished his attire; but there was something very jaunty, intelligent, gay, and impudent, in his rosy face and *tout ensemble*. His mandolin announced him to be one of the improvisatori,—wandering minstrels, or itinerant storytellers.

I know not whether those men are worthy of the name of inspired poets; but, so wonderful is their talent for versification, that some of the better class of them have been known to produce, extempore, a five-act tragedy, and an epic, divided into cantos, and having a regular plot, characters, and dialogues,—all maintained in octave-syllabic rhyme. I had often encountered them in Sicily, where, by the wayside and among the mountains, their songs had cheered the tedium of many a long march, and had bestowed many a ducat upon them,—regarding the wanderers as representatives of the ancient troubadours or minnesingers, once so common over the whole of Europe; but the modern minstrel we encountered at Reggio provoked me extremely.

‘Benissimo!’ cried he, while coins of every description showered from all quarters into the high crown of his inverted hat. ‘The illustrious cavalier has given me a

gallant theme; Madonna aid me to do it justice! Signori, you will hear a story of the brave English captain, who took the castle of Scylla for King Ferdinand, and so gained the love of a fair Italian signora."

"Bravissimo!" cried the men, and the women clapped their hands, exultingly.

Castelermo glanced at me with a droll smile, and we both burst into a fit of laughter.

"Impossible! the fellow cannot mean me!" said I.

"You shall hear: Ah! the prelude—hear him—excellent! He excels Andrea Marone in verse; and our fair Corilla, the gifted peasant-girl of Pistoia, who, amid the roar of a hundred cannon, was crowned queen of the gentle art at Rome, could not finger the mandolin more lightly, or with better taste. Basta! he should make his fortune!"

Imagine my surprise, on hearing the improvisatore give forth, extempore, to his eager, silent, and gaping audience, a song or poem of some thirty or forty long verses, in very tolerable *ottava rima*, descriptive of the siege and storm of Scylla, in which, under the name of Claudio Dundazo, I was continually mentioned in a strain of most extravagant compliment, as the *valorous capitano*, and most gallant *cavaliere* in the world. What annoyed me most was, that the name of Bianca d'Alfieri had not escaped the minstrel, who made her the heroine of his impudent epic.

"Oh! Castelermo—by the Lord! this is too ridiculous. I care not about myself; but Bianca's name, to be used thus, for amusing the rabble of Reggio!" said I, starting up: "How the proud girl's cheek would flush, if she knew of this! You gave him the theme."

"The theme, merely.—Hush!" added the knight, detaining me, as the improvisatore concluded, describing our joyous marriage, in a splendid cathedral, with incense burning, bells ringing, and priests praying. After a grand invocation of all the saints,—to whom he described us as vowing several pounds of excellent wax-candle, whilst a magnificent petticoat was promised to Our Lady of Burello,—the bard concluded: once more he inverted his hat, into which we each threw our mite.

"His profession must be the best in Italy," said I, on beholding the shower of coins which rained into the

amply-brimmed receiver,—the clanking dollar, the ringing carlino, and the tinkling bajocch.

"He has acquitted himself well: Corilla, herself, could not have done better; and, believe me, I pay the wanderer no ordinary compliment in saying so."

"But he must be cautioned against using the name of the Signora d'Alfieri in future."

"Already he has gone, signor," replied the knight, "and your threats and requests he would neither hear nor obey. The improvisatori will find the celebration of the fall of Scylla the most popular theme in the Calabrias, where all rejoice that the horse of Naples once more spreads its wings over the last stronghold of Napoleon in the province. Did you not observe how his enthusiasm enabled him to acquit himself, and how he seemed to rejoice in his wondrous art? While describing the night attack on Scylla, his breast seemed to pant with ardour, and his eyes sparkled with animation; his swarthy cheek glowed crimson, while his rapid and liquid words enchained his listening audience. He is a handsome fellow: at that moment, he seemed beautiful, and all the women were in raptures with him. Yet how still they remained, as if a spell was upon them, until he concluded, and then burst forth the universal shout of 'Excellentissimo—oh! most excellent!'"

On our return to Scylla, as I dismounted, throwing the reins to my groom, he informed me that an Italian general officer was waiting for me at the house of Signora Pia, on some business of importance. Startled by this communication, I hurried to my billet, and found the supposed general to be old Zaccho Andronicus, who, in his gorgeous chasseur's livery, might easily be mistaken for some officer by Mr. Bob Brown, whose perceptions of things, beyond the heel-post of the stable, were none of the clearest.

I joyously welcomed "the old grey Grecian," who had recovered from his wound, and was now bearer of a letter from Bianca, in answer to one despatched the night before Scylla was stormed. I consigned him, forthwith, to the care of my padrona, and hurried away to enjoy, in solitude, the delight of perusing Bianca's first—and, as it proved, her last—letter.

Written in her pretty little running hand, it began with the usual address of "*caro signor*;" but my heart leaped, on finding the fair girl using the frank and more endearing

phrase of "*anima mia*." The viscontessa begged to be remembered to me: she had lost an enormous sum at far last night, with the last of her suite of brilliants. Luigi was slowly recovering from the effects of his wound, but his peace of mind was gone for ever. To hasten his recovery, his mother had thrice vowed a solemn pilgrimage to the cave of St. Rosalia, in Sicily, but had as often abandoned the attempt, and vowed candles to San Ugo, instead; since which he had begun to recover more rapidly, and all at the villa had no doubt that the saint had interceded in his behalf. She applauded my conduct at Scylla; and, to me, her praise was more valuable, and more highly prized, than that of the generals. She had perused all the despatches in the *Gazetta Britannica*, and her heart had leaped alternately with pride and joy—with fear and horror—at the narration. "Oh! Claude," she continued, "you know not how proud I am of you—how I rejoice at your escape! But Francesca, my sister—my unhappy sister!—we can discover no trace of her—her fate is enveloped in mystery. We have every horror to fear; for Petronio, the bishop of Cosenza, though deemed a saint by the peasantry, is a bold and bad-hearted man, and, Francesca in his power!—oh! Madonna! Would that you could visit us; her loss and Luigi's illness fill us with perplexity and dismay."

Next day, I despatched an answer by the chasseur, promising to solicit the general for a few days' leave of absence, to visit the villa. But this idea was never realized in the manner I expected, as I was despatched, on urgent duty, to the Adriatic shore, a day or two afterwards.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NAVARRO.—REVENGE!

ALTHOUGH I had no doubt that this honourable personage, for the purpose of disgracing me or endangering my life, had, in that true national spirit of revenge of which every day brought forth some new example, forged the letter which Gascoigne received, still I had not sufficient proof of the fact, either to "call him out," or place him under arrest. We met daily in the garrison, and

glances of undisguised hostility from him were duly answered by those of contempt from me: but such a state of things, between men wearing swords, could not endure long.

A whisper of suspicion—most injurious to the honour of Navarro, as a man of courage and loyalty—was circulated through the brigade. Shunned, scorned, and placed in *Couventry*, by the officers, alighted, and regarded with curious eyes, by the soldiers, his baseness recoiled upon himself,—he led a life of solitary wretchedness and misery. But he was a traitor and Buonapartist at heart, and in close correspondence with Regnier, to whom he soon deserted, yet not before committing one of those atrocities which disgraced Italy then, as often as they do a certain western island now.

Having so many adventures to describe, and so much to relate, I must be brief. My quarrel with Navarro soon came to a crisis: being sent to him by the general, with a message relative to the re-fortifying of Scylla, I was so provoked by his dogged insolence, that I laid my riding-switch pretty severely across his back; a challenge ensued, and we were to fight next morning, in the most remote part of the fortress.

Cool and determined, though exasperated, I went to bed without the least anxiety: I had no doubt of coming off victorious; and, hardened as I was by the bloodshed of service, would have cared no more for shooting Navarro, than killing a partridge. Now, it appears to me singular with what deliberation Castelfermo and I made our preparations over-night,—rolling six pistol cartridges, fixing the flints, oiling the springs, and putting all in order to start by daybreak. After supping as usual, we retired to bed, each giving the other solemn injunctions not to sleep too long.

I have already stated, that, in consequence of the crowded state of the billets, we both occupied the same room.

About daybreak, I started, and awoke; the business on hand rushed upon my memory. I sat up in bed, and reflected for a moment on the events another hour might bring forth: my train of thought was arrested by observing a current of air agitating the muslin curtains of my couch, and causing them to float about like banners. I leaped out, and, to my surprise perceived the casement

unbolted and open,—admitting, at once, the cold sea-breeze and dull grey morning light.

“Castelermo—signor, rouse! It wants but twenty minutes to the time, by my watch.”

“And ten by mine,” said Gascoigne, putting in his head: he was closely muffled up in his cloak. “What! only turning out; eh, Dandas?”

“It is all very well for you to be in a hurry,” said I, pettishly. “You Irishmen take these affairs quite as matters of course. I’ll be ready in a minute; a chill morning for a shooting-party,” I added with a poor attempt at a laugh, “Where is Macnesia?”

“Below, with his instruments; but your friend, the knight, sleeps soundly. Hallo, Castelermo!”

There was still no reply. Dressing in haste, I called often, but received no answer; and, supposing that he must have risen, I drew back the curtain of his sleeping-place, to assure myself, when a scarcely articulate exclamation of horror escaped my lips. Imagine my grief and astonishment, to behold our poor friend lying drenched in his blood, pale and lifeless!

I placed my hand on his heart; it was cold and still. Gascoigne bent over the window, and shouted—

“Macnesia—Macnesia—you devil you, come here!” The doctor arrived in a moment, but the cavalier was beyond his skill; there was not the slightest warmth or pulsation. The gallant, the noble, and chivalric Castelermo had perished by the hand of a cowardly assassin. Buried to the very cross-guard, in his heart, a little ebony-hilted poniard was struck, with such force, that some strength had to be exerted to draw it forth; and, on my doing so, a strip of paper, attached to the pommel, attracted our attention; it contained these words:—

“Let those who would avenge this insolent *Briton*, seek me among the ranks of the French at Cassano; a word I might have forgiven—a blow, never.—*Pietro Navarro*.”

Although boiling with indignation, I shuddered at the fate I had so narrowly escaped. For me it was that the fatal stroke had been intended; and I then remembered Castelermo’s warning, to beware of the cowardly Navarro. Clambering up by a garden-wall, the miscreant had reached our casement, which he had contrived to open noiselessly; but on entering the room he had mistaken the

unfortunate cavalier's bed for mine, and my friend had thus perished in my stead.

"The blow must have been struck about midnight," said Macnesia.

Only an hour after we retired to rest: perhaps Navarro had been outside the window during the greater part of the night, watching our preparations for the intended meeting next morning. But, with three hundred of our soldiers, we had all a narrower escape from this Italian's hatred and duplicity, of which the reader shall hear more anon.

The Signoressa Pia was overwhelmed with consternation and dismay on learning that the knight of Malta had perished under her roof. Followed by a mob of fishermen, the podestà, with his clerk, arrived and committed to writing a statement of the facts; while I preserved the poniard and the assassin's signature for production and evidence, should a day of retribution ever arrive.

Enraged at this act of sacrilege, the populace searched every nook and corner in the town; two or three old knights of Castelfermo's order, who resided in the neighbourhood, armed and mounted their followers and servants, who, in conjunction with those of the podestà, and a detachment of our light troops, scoured the whole country round; yet without success. Navarro was nowhere to be found; but we soon after learned that he had sought refuge behind the lines of his friends, the French; who still remained intrenched at Cassano, awaiting the slow advance of Massena.

In the solitary mountain-chapel of San Bartolommeo, poor Castelfermo was interred with military honours; the grenadiers of Sir Louis de Watteville, drawn up outside the edifice, fired three volleys over it, while the coffin was lowered down in front of the altar; where he now lies with his mantle, sword, and spurs, like a knight "of old Lisle Adam's days."

He was one of the last cavaliers of the original order, which for two hundred and sixty-eight years had possessed the isle of Malta. Since 1800, when France ceded the rock to Britain, they have been gradually declining in power, and disappearing; and, although at the petty courts of Italy a few aged men are sometimes seen with the eight-pointed cross of the order on their bosoms, the Knights of Rhodes and St. John of Jerusalem have, in

effect, passed away ; like Castelfermo himself, their glory is now with the things that were.

Unfortunately, I was not present to witness the celebration of my friend's obsequies. On the close of this day, which had commenced so inauspiciously, I had returned with the light infantry, and wearied by a long search among the woods and hills, was sitting dejectedly in my billet alone, when Pierce, the general's orderly, arrived with a message, that I was wanted by his master. I took up my sabre, and followed him to the antique mansion where I had first seen Sir John Stuart, on my arrival at Scylla.

The general was engaged in writing ; the table was covered with despatches, returns, reports, and morning-states ; a map of Italy and a pair of compasses lay close by. The rosy light of the setting sun streamed through the barred and latticed window on his stern Scottish features, his silver hairs, and faded uniform ; and the tarnished aiguillette and oak-leaves, a cross of the Bath, a medal for Maida, and clasps for other services, all blackened by powder-smoke and the effects of the weather, gave him a very service-born and soldier-like aspect.

"Pierce, hand Captain Dundas a chair, and wait outside."

"Help yourself, Claude," said he, pushing two decanters of *Lacrima* and *Zante* towards me, after asking a few hurried questions concerning our fruitless chase after the runaway engineer. "Fill your glass ; the *Zante* is tolerable ; and just excuse me for five minutes, will you ?" He continued writing, and then folded a long and very official-like document. "A journey is before you," said he ; "and as you will have to start to-morrow morning by daybreak, light marching order is best."

"For where, Sir John ?"

"Crotona ; I would not have sent you back there, but *Lascelles* of yours has not returned from *Cassano*, and Lieutenant-Colonel *Moore* is not available. Will you believe it ? I have received orders from the ministry to abandon the *Calabrias* forthwith, or do that which is the same ; to order back the expedition to *Sicily*, leaving garrisons in the strong places we have taken. These troops will, of course, become the prisoners of *Massena* ; who (I am informed by a despatch from General *Sherbrooke*) has arrived at *Cassano*, and is there concentrating a force,

which will soon burst over both provinces like a torrent; so that Maida was won, the citadel of Crotona taken, and the castles of St. Amanthea, Monteleone, and Scylla, all gallantly stormed, for nothing. We might as well have remained in peace in our barracks at Palermo. But, however foolish and contrary to my own conviction, those orders must be obeyed. One of the Sicilian government galleys will take you hence to-morrow, and put you on board the *Aspion*, in the Adriatic. Give my compliments to Captain Hoste, with this order, to take on board Colonel Macleod's command from Crotona, and convey it straight to Messina. To Macleod you will convey these instructions; to deliver over the citadel, with its cannon and stores, to five hundred of the free Calabri, who will in future be its garrison, and be commanded by major the cavaliere del Castagno, or any other officer whom that insubordinate fellow the Visconte Santiago may appoint. A detachment of De Watterville's shall hold Monteleone; and Captain Piozzi, with a few of the Italian guards, the castle of St. Amanthea. I am resolved that as few British troops as possible shall be sacrificed by the folly of our friends in authority. Your regiment is the best in Sicily, and a wing, or detachment of it, will garrison Scylla, which is of the utmost importance to us as a key to Italy; but, if hard pressed by Massena, they can easily abandon it under the protection of our shipping.

"To-morrow I return to the camp, to embark the main body of our army for Messina; you will, of course, come round with Macleod's Highlanders, and rejoin me at Palermo, where I hope we shall spend many a merry evening in talking over our campaign among the Apennines."

I was in a sort of a maze while the general so good-naturedly explained his plans and orders, in which I felt very little satisfaction. My thoughts were at the villa. To leave Calabria at present, was, perhaps, to leave Bianca; a deadly blow to my air-built castles; unless Massena's legions marched south in time to change the intentions of our leader. Relying on the general's friendship, I had no doubt that my return to Sicily might be delayed for a time; therefore, I did not hesitate to solicit the appointment of commandant at Scylla, with the local rank of major in Italy.

"You are but a young officer, and the charge is a most

important one," said he, impressively: "but you are getting tired of me, Dundas?"

"Far from it, Sir John; the staff——"

"I am afraid I task you too severely; well, as a punishment for your discontent, you shall have Scylla to keep, so long as our friend Massena will permit. His advance will soon scare the garrison out of it. I cannot refuse you that which you underwent so many toils and risks to attain; the nomination will appear shortly in general orders" (he made a memorandum); "but on *one* condition it is granted, that you do not spend too much of your time at St. Eufemio."

I coloured at the inuendo, while the old fellow laughed at what he considered a hit, and held the decanter of glowing Zante between him and the sunlight. He shook me heartily by the hand, and, buckling up the despatches in my sabretache, I hurried back to my billet to desire my servant to pack my valise, and have all in order for starting by daybreak.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CAVALLLO MARINO.

THE report of the morning gun had scarcely pealed away from the ramparts, ere Brown appeared by my bedside, and the *réveil* rang through the echoing stillness of the castle above me. In barracks, there are few sensations more agreeable than that of being awakened by the *réveil* on the dawn of a summer's day; gradually its sweet low wail steals upon the waking senses, sadly and slowly at first, then increasing in strength and power, till the full body of music floats through the morning air, redoubled by the echoes of the empty barrack-courts, when, as the measure from the slowness of a Scottish lament increases to the rapidity of a reel, the drums roll impatiently, as if to rouse the tardy sleepers.

"Well, Bob, what kind of morning is it?" said I, scrambling up, shivering and yawning.

"Cold and raw, sir—the drums sound as if muffled, a sure sign of a damp morning. The galley's boat is at the castle stairs, sir."

It was chilly and dark daybreak; the ramparts of

Scylla looked black and wet ; the sentinels, buttoned up in their dark great-coats, kept close within turret and box ; a thick fog floated on the surface of the sea, and rolled in eddying volumes around the caverned rock and the hills of Milia. With Bob's assistance, I soon donned my tight leather breeches and jack-boots, and shaved hurriedly by candle-light, using the case of my watch, in lieu of a dressing-glass. It was a morning of that kind when it requires all one's resolution to leave a comfortable bed, and turn out in five minutes, to face a drizzly fog and cold sea-breeze ; so, tightening my waist-belt, I threw my cloak round me, bade a hasty adieu to my kind padrona and her dishes of polenta, and sallied forth.

The boat awaited me at the sea staircase, a flight of steps hewn in the solid rock, and descending from the castle to the water, which was rolling in snowy foam on those at the bottom. I threw my portmanteau on board, and leaped after it. Brown saluted and bade me adieu, while I warned him, on peril of his head, to attend to Cartouche and see him duly fed and watered, as I used to do myself.

The boat was shoved off, and we shot away into the mist from the lofty rock of Scylla, which, with its castled summit, loomed like some tall giant through the flying vapour. The oars dipped and rose from the wave in measured time, while the boatmen chanted and sang of the glories of Massaniello, the fisherman of Amalfi, and of the mad friar, Campanello, who led the Calabrian revolvers in 1590.

In the pauses of their chorus, I could hear the boom of the waves in the hollow caverns, sending forth sounds like the howling of dogs and the roaring of Scylla's ravening wolves, who abode among darkness and misery, and rendered the spot so terrible to the ancient mariner ; but the noise died away as the distance increased. The fog arose from the face of the waters, the rising sun began to gild the summits of the Sicilian and Italian hills, and I beheld the war-galley lying, like a many-legged monster, on the bosom of the brightening deep. We steered alongside, the oars were laid in, and the side-ropes and ladder were lowered into the boat, which two sailors held steady, at stem and stern, by means of hooks. The galley was named the *Cavallò Marino*, and a gigantic sea-horse reared up at her prow ; the same emblem appeared carved

upon her quarters, and the name was painted, in large red letters, on the broad white blade of every sweep. She was a high vessel, pulled by fifty oars, each of them at least forty feet long, and worked by five miserable slaves, half-naked; they were chained by the wrists to the oar, or else fastened to their seats, between which there ran, fore and aft, a long plank or gangway, where the boatswain or taskmaster walked about, applying his lash on the bare shoulders of those unhappy wretches who did not exert themselves sufficiently.

The sailors of the *Cavallo Marino*, about fifteen in number, were stationed forward; she was armed with a large thirty-two pound fore-castle piece, and manned by two hundred and fifty slaves, the dregs of the prisons and dungeons of Naples and Sicily,—assassins, bandits, runaway priests, and villains of all descriptions, steeped in guilt of every imaginable kind. She had a captain, two lieutenants, and a few petty officers, who wore the government uniform; they were grouped on her lofty poop when I ascended on board. I was received, according to the custom of that service, by a cheer from the slaves; but, alas! such a cheer! It was more like a yell from the regions of darkness; for the boatswain and his mates used their ratans unsparingly, to increase the joy of my arrival. Many a bitter malediction was growled by the Italians, whose eyes gleamed like those of coiled-up snakes; many a pious cry to God broke from the swarthy Algerines, who were there doing penance for the slavery to which their countrymen subjected those unhappy Christians who, by conquest or shipwreck, fell under their horrible dominion. A Moor of Barbary, or a corsair of Algeria, formed the fifth slave at every sweep. The poop was armed with a few brass swivel guns; and the standard, having the arms of Sicily quartered with those of Naples, was displayed from a tall staff, rigged aft, and hung drooping in deep folds over the water, which it swept at times, when agitated by the morning breeze.

The officers were the only men on board who wore their side-arms; the slaves were all too securely chained to be dreaded, notwithstanding their number.

By the captain, Guevarra, a pompous little Sicilian, I was formally welcomed on board "his majesty's galley *Sea-Horse*" (a phrase he was very fond of repeating),

and invited to breakfast with the officers in their little den under the poop. Here we were often in darkness, as the long folds of the standard obscured the windows; but when the wind wafted it aside, the full radiance of the rising sun glared in through the openings, on the light-blue uniforms, silver epaulettes, and weather-beaten visages of my entertainers; on the glass cups of smoking coffee and thick chocolate, a savoury ham, with piles of eggs, pyramids of bread, and all the appurtenances of the breakfast-table.

"Per Baccho!" said the captain—who, though a little man, was armed with a prodigious sabre, and wore a most extravagant pair of mustacheos—"per Baccho! signor," he continued, with a most bland Sicilian smile, "it would have been a particular favour, had the general sent you off to us last night; by this time we should have doubled Spartivento; and, as there is some word of a French line-of-battle ship being up the Gulf of Tarento, his valour who commands the *Amphion* will be impatient to be joined by his majesty's galley *Sea-Horse*.—Lieutenant, I'll trouble you for the maccaroons. We shall have some rough weather before evening, and these double-banked galleys ship every sea that strikes them.—The muffins?—with pleasure, signor.—And, truly, one is safer anchored close by the Tower of the Lantern, than exposed to a lee shore and all the damnable currents that run round Spartivento in the evening. But, believe me, signor, that his majesty's galley *Sea-Horse*—Boy! pass the word for more coffee."

"Si signor capitano," replied a little olive-checked urchin in shirt and trousers, who vanished with the silver coffee-pot.

"Considering the beauty of the morning, and the unclouded splendour of the sun, I trust," said I, "with all due submission to your better judgment, that you may prove a false prophet."

"Impossible, signor!" replied the Sicilian, who was doing ample justice to all the good things before him. "I have sailed in—an egg, thank you—in his majesty's galleys, for forty years, and know every shoal, current, rock, and sign of the Italian seas, better than the boasted Palinurus of old—Better?" said I. Bah! I hold him to be an arrant blockhead, and no seaman, to resign his

helm to Signor Morpheus, whose 'Stygian dew' I believe to have been a big-bellied flask of most potent Gioja or French brandy."

"But Palinurus was an accursed heathen, like his master, misnamed the 'pious Æneas;' and, having no saint to patronize him, could expect nothing else than mishaps," said one of the lieutenants.

"Right, Vinoni," replied the captain; "but we, sailors of his majesty of Sicily, are the Madonna's peculiar care. Faugh! a tarantella in the cream-pot and fire-flies in the marmalade. Yes, Signor Dundas," he continued, resuming his former theme, "there is a regular hurricane gathering, though from what point I cannot quite determine. Last night, the yellow moon rose above the Calabrian hills, surrounded by a luminous halo,—a sure sign of a tough gale, which Madonna avert; what is worse, we may have it in our teeth, blowing right ahead, before we round yonder Capo del Armi. On our voyage from Palermo, yesterday, as we passed through the Lipari Isles, they were covered by a white vapour,—a sure sign of a north-east wind; but though the shore lies on our lee, his majesty's galley can always use her sweeps, and give it a wide berth."

"But did you not remark, signor," said Vinoni, "that before we came in sight of the Pharo, the mist had floated away from the Lipari, and the mouth of Stromboli threw clear flames across the sky, whilst the waves smoked and growled with a remarkable noise,—all sure tokens of a land breeze."

"Right, Vinoni!" said the captain, whose opinion was generally formed on that of his lieutenant: "right, corpo! I feel it blowing down the Straits at this moment, and the white foam that curls before it on the water, announces a coming squall."

Leaving these weather-wise Italians to settle the matter as they chose, I walked forward, to observe the accommodation and construction of this peculiar vessel. She was now under weigh, and, though strained from stem to stern by every stroke of the sweeps, she moved through the water with a motion so easy and rapid, that her officers had little occasion to dread either contrary winds or tides.

The broad-bladed sweeps brushed the ocean into foam, which roared in surf beneath the sharp bows, boiling away

under the counter, and leaving astern a long white wake in the glittering sea. The sun was now up, and his rosy morning light cast a warm glow over land and ocean.

Captain Guevarra stood beside me on the poop, and pointed out the different towns, mountains, and headlands, as we moved down the Straits: his observations proved amusing, from the strange compound of knowledge and ignorance, religion, superstition, and vanity, they exhibited.

We were soon in mid-channel: the fruitful shore of old Trinacria, studded with innumerable towns and villages, nestling on the green hills, embosomed among the richest foliage, or shining along the sandy and sunny beach, rose in succession on the view, while piles of picturesque mountains closed the background,—and soon, chief amongst them all, gigantic Etna reared up its mighty cone, appearing to rise from the watery horizon on our starboard bow. From its yawning crater, a lengthened column of light vapour ascended into the pure air, in one steady, straight, and unbroken line, piercing the pale-blue immensity of space, and rising to an altitude where, in the soft regions of upper air, it was for ever lost to the eye.

As the range of the Neptunian hills, and the town of Messina,—with its large cathedral, its numerous churches and convents, its terraced streets, sweeping round swelling eminences; and its busy harbour crowded by a forest of masts,—closed, lessened, and sank astern, the bay of Reggio, on the other hand, opened to our view, with all the spires and casements of its town gleaming in the beams of the morning sun, the high peaks of its hills behind covered to the summit with dark-green pines, and fragrant orange or citron trees. The galley-slaves were now pulling with all their strength, to make headway against the strong current which runs towards Cape Pelorus, but we soon got clear of the eddies, and moved through the water with astonishing speed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RACE.—GALLEY-SLAVES.

"YONDER is Rhegium, signor," said the Captain Guevarra, "where Æolus dwelt before he removed his government over to Sicily, and where he sold fair winds to mariners, and tied the foul ones up in paper bags—the cursed heathen! And yet it would be some advantage if such commodities could be purchased in these vulgar modern days. I have known the time when I would have given sixty pieces of gold for a single puff of fair wind; but that was before I had the honour of commanding his majesty's galley *Sea-Horse*, and all those stout rogues who work it. Ah! Madonna mia!" he ejaculated, crossing himself, as we walked on the weather side of the poop; "what is all this I have been saying? Our Lady of Sicily forgive me the thought, and keep me contented with such winds as pass over the sea, without buying from heathen, heretic, or devil! Viva! how bravely the old *Sea-Horse* shoots through the water! Believe me, Signor Dundas, there is not another galley in the service of his Sicilian majesty equalling this, for strength, speed, and beauty of mould."

"Yet there is a little vessel yonder, cracking on under every stitch of canvas, which seems able and disposed to beat you."

"Beat the *Sea-Horse*—beat his majesty's galley!" cried the little commander, stamping his feet on the deck. "Corpo di Baccho! if any man on board, save yourself, signor, had even hinted that such a thing was possible, I would have dropped him from the yard-arm, with a forty-pound shot at his heels; I would, this instant—I, Gandolfo Guevarra."

After this outburst, I did not venture on another remark, and we walked up and down in silence. Between us and Cape Pillari, a swift little Maltese schooner, of a most rakish cut, was flying through the water, with her snow-white canvas shining in the sun, and bellying out to the breeze, while her flashing sweeps were moving, stroke for stroke, with those of the galley, which she was evidently leaving astern. She was low-built, almost level with the water, which she cleft like an arrow.

"Ola! the boatswain cried Guevarra, perspiring with rage, which made every fibre of his little body quiver while he twisted his long mustaches, and looked fierce as a rat at bay. "By the blood of Gennaro! that villainous craft is leaving us astern. Shall a runaway of Malta, laden with base merchandise, beat his majesty's galley the *Sea-Horse*? No, no—Madonna! Quick, rascal! there, fly-flap the shoulders of the oarsmen, or your own shall smart before sunset. And you, signor—master-gunner."

"Si, signor illustrissimo."

"Ready—the gun there, forward; to teach those vagabonds to keep their distance, and not attempt to rival those who sail under his majesty's pennant."

The forecastle-piece was double-shotted, and cleared away for action; while the boatswain and his mates flew from stem to stern, lashing unmercifully the bare shoulders of the slaves, with as little remorse as one would the flanks of a vicious horse. Tremendous curses and horrible blasphemies followed this application of the rotans, and the unhappy wretches toiled until their swarthy skins were deluged in perspiration, which mingled with the blood streaming from their lacerated backs. The storm of maledictions soon died away, their exhausted strength requiring that they should work in silence; and I looked on, in pity and disgust, while the miserable beings toiled at the ponderous oars, with measured action, which strained every muscle to its utmost power of tension. On glancing along the rows of black-browed, unshaven, and lowering visages, I read one expression in them all—a fearful one! Of what demoniac minds were those stern eyes the index! A thirst for vengeance, rather than for freedom, animated their savage Italian hearts; every bosom was a hell of pent-up passion—every man a chained fiend.

The sweeps were moved by each gang rising simultaneously from their bench, and then resuming the sitting position; again rising, and again sitting, without a moment's respite from toil; and if any man failed to exert himself sufficiently, every slave at that particular sweep received the same number of blows as the delinquent. Such, Guevarra, informed me, was the unjust rule in his majesty's galleys. One poor wretch dropped dead; and, while a shower of blows was distributed to his four comrades, to make them work harder, the iron-hearted boat-

swain, unlocked with a master-key the padlock which held the chain, and the body was flung into the deep. Many a glance of envy followed it, as it disappeared beneath the bright green water, and once more groans of grief and growls of smothered rage broke forth; but, though the slaves toiled on till the galley seemed to fly through the water, the little scampavia still kept ahead of her.

"Work! work! or beware the scurlada," cried the boatswain, who now flourished a gigantic whip, beneath the whisk of which every slave cowered instinctively. "Ahi, Frà Maso, different work this from mumbling Latin at Palermo," he cried, bestowing a burning lash on the back of one who had been a priest; "work, work, sloths, if you wish not your hides flayed off. Ohi! you, there, with the nose like Ovid, and face like the O of Giotto, dost think thou art selling paste buckles at Messina: once more? Bend to the oar, Maestro Naso, or feel *that*!"

A yell burst from the unhappy Israelite, as the terrible lash ploughed up his tender skin, while the task-master continued:—"Work, work! pull away larboard and starboard; give way, my beauties, if you would have life left you to behold the sun set. Bravo, my merry little devil at the bow-oar; you seem a very Cicero, and look as if born with the sweep in your hand."

A laugh, rising into a yell, at the bow, attracted my attention, and, on going forward, I perceived the hunchback, Gaspare Truffi, tugging away at the first oar, which he pulled in conjunction with three men, his strength being deemed equal to that of two slaves.

As I stepped along the gangway, scowling and inquiring glances were cast upon me, by the swart and naked oarsmen. I could not resist saying in a low voice,

"Poor men! truly I pity you!"

These words were not thrown away.

"Madonna bless thee, Signor Inglese," said he who had been called Frà Maso; "like thy countrymen, thou art merciful!"

"Merciful! bah!" cried Truffi; "have I not seen them scourge their brave soldiers like dogs—even as we are now scourged!"

I watched the exertions of the powerful hunchback with surprise; he toiled away with what appeared most decided good-will, without receiving a single blow from

the boatswain, although his conical hump and shaggy breast presented prominent marks for the taskmaster's scourge. His aspect was grotesque beyond description, as he tugged away and strained until every muscle in his deformed body seemed about to snap; his matted black hair overhung his fierce twinkling eyes, and a forest of the same material fringed his capacious mouth, which every instant sent forth a yell or a shout of laughter. On my approach, he bent to the oar with redoubled fury, raving and howling, while he spat towards me, in token of hatred and undying enmity. With more astonishment than commiseration, with more disgust than pity, I regarded this curious little desperado, whose hideous form contrasted so strongly with the powerful and herculean frames of the other slaves; their bodies, naked to the waist, and having every muscle hardened to rigidity by excessive toil, presented in almost every instance perfect models for the artist and sculptor.

A half-stifled sob—a hurried exclamation—caused me to turn towards a fine-looking old slave, to whose antique contour of head and face additional dignity was lent by a venerable beard, which swept his breast. Never shall I forget the glance with which his keen, dark eyes regarded me; his features had all that noble regularity and proud contour which are often found in old Italian portraits; but there was a stern expression of care in them, and the hard contracted lines of his face showed a long acquaintance with grief, or an exquisite degree of mental agony. It was the Major Gismondo! Alas! how changed now was the brave old cavalry officer—the once gay *cicisbeo* of the fashionable *viscontessa*!

"Here! you here?" I exclaimed.

"Well may you wonder that I survive," said he, the blood suffusing his temples when our eyes met; but he was compelled to turn away, the whip of the boatswain at that moment descended on his shoulders, and I returned to the poop. My heart bled for the unmerited misery and degradation of the poor old man; but to converse with him was quite contrary to etiquette and orders. On questioning Guevarra concerning him—

"I trust, signor," said he, "you will excuse me; but it is impossible for a captain of his majesty's galleys to know the biography of every rogue who tugs at the benches." He coloured, with manifest confusion.

"A droll fellow, that hunchback, who pulls the bow-ear."

"Ah!" replied Guevarra, "a perfect imp o' Etna; I am very much indebted to my good friend, the visconte Santugo, for sending him off to me yesterday. He was caught lurking near the villa d'Alfieri by the soldiers who guard it. Per Baccho! I was half frightened when I saw him on board—ha, ha! he has all the aspect of a stunted Cyclop, and works so well, that he has a fair prospect of being promoted to the rank of task-master. He laughs, chuckles, and sings incessantly, but for what reason is beyond my comprehension, as there is nothing here but hard work, heavy blows, and scanty provender—unless we except the honour of serving in his majesty's galley *Sea-Horse*. Diavolo!" he cried, rushing to the other side of the poop, "the Maltese schooner has passed us. Pull, rascals—give way ye lubberly Padri—give way fore and aft! Shall the gallant *Cavallo Marino*, the flower of our galleys, and the peculiar care of our thrice-blessed Madonna, be beaten by a d—d scampavia?" He bowed and crossed himself with great devotion before a little gilt figure of the Virgin, which occupied a niche in the centre of a row of brightly-painted buckets, ranged along the top of the poop. But Madonna was sued in vain. Again the whistling ratans were flourished on all sides; even Gaspare Truffi did not escape, and his elfish yell sounded shrill as the whistle of a steam-engine, when the blows descended on his naked hump.

On—on shot the scampavia, and the lofty galley toiled after her in vain; the former carried a press of canvas sufficient to run her under the water, which flashed like blue fire before her sharp prow, and she shipped sea after sea, as we rounded the Capo del Armi, and the snow-clad summit of Etna sank beneath the dim horizon astern; the water was getting rough, the breeze increasing, and it was evident that she must take in sail or be capized. A half-smothered cheer arose from her crew, who crowded her side, as they saw us rapidly dropping astern.

Boundless was the wrath of Guevarra; he stamped about the deck, while his long sword became entangled at every stride with his little bandy legs: he curled his bushy whiskers, fumed and blasphemed like a pagan

Save the slaves, all on board, more or less, partook of his chagrin ; while smiling at his rage, even I could not avoid a feeling of annoyance, for one becomes jealous of being passed at sea, or beaten by a rival mail, or getting the "go-by" from a friend's team on a country road.

"By the miraculous blood of Gennaro ! I will teach these mongrel curs, these Arabian Maltese, to beware how they try speed with his majesty's galley. Is the gun ready there forward ?"

"All ready, Signor Capitano," replied the gunner, taking the tompion from the lefty fore-castle-piece, and lighting his match.

"Then give them a shot between wind and water. Madonna speed the ball—fire !"

The helmsman brought the galley's head round, and the thirty-two pounder was levelled and fired. The *Sea-Horse* shook with the concussion ; the shot whistled over the water ; a breach was made in the low bulwarks of the Maltese, and a shower of white splinters flew away to leeward. The schooner was immediately thrown in the wind ; down came her fore and main topsails, her jib and staysail, like lightning on her deck, while the scarlet flag of Britain was run up to her gaff-peak. The galley shot ahead ; her great latteen sail, that tapered away and aloft, was braced sharp up, and once more we flew forward, while the Maltese did not again begin to make-sail, until she was a league or so astern.

"Bravissimo, *Sea-Horse* !" said Guevarra, clapping his hands in glee. "Now we are leaving her, hand over hand."

In the ardour of the race, he had not been paying due attention to his course ; and, in keeping to seaward of the scampavia, which was probably bound for the Venetian Gulf, the galley was further from the land than she ought to have been ; her head was turned northward, and, as we slowly approached the Apennine chain, the promontory of Hercules rose gradually on the view.

We now made but little progress ; the breeze had died away ; the heat of the day was intense, for the sirocco was abroad ; and the air was glittering with sulphury particles, blown, probably, from the peak of Etna. Wearied with their late exertions, the over-taxed slaves, exposed to the broiling sun, sat gazing listlessly, with their glaring

and bloodshot eyes, on the glassy sea; and even the ratan of the drowsy and perspiring boatswain failed to rouse them from their apathy. The little way we made was solely owing to the large square mainsail; and, though the galley lay close to the scarcely perceptible current of air, our progress was not a mile an hour; yet, long before the setting sun began to redden the blue Ionian Sea, Guevarra had the mortification to see the little Maltese gull with her sweeps round the promontory and disappear.

During the weary noon of that scorching day, while the wretched slaves sat naked at their oars, exposed to the fierce bright sun, Guevarra and his officers were seated under a cool awning on the poop, enjoying their siesta, after a luncheon of light fruits and lighter wines, while the boatswain, his mates, the gunner and his mates, chewed their macaroni, and drank cold water, under a similar contrivance, on the forecastle. Miserable was the plight of the poor unpitied slaves; chained to the oaken bench, which formed their seat when they toiled, and their bed when they slept, and on which they were alternately exposed by noon to the broiling heat of an Italian meridian, and by night to the chill blasts of the ocean; half naked, continually suffering castigation; fed on the worst and coarsest food, and packed so closely, that dreadful diseases were continually breaking out among them.

The day became closer; not a breath stirred the languid, breezeless air; the sea-birds floated on the still bosom of the glassy deep, and the mainsail flapped heavily on the mast as the galley rolled on the slow-heaving ground swell. She was drifted shoreward by the currents: in the afternoon we were close to the land, and I began to fear that my journey to Crotona would be of longer duration than the general expected.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE REVOLT OF THE GALLEY-SLAVES.

It was night—beautiful night! The cold, pale moon gleamed on the waste of waters, on the silent shore, on the hills of Magna Græcia, and on the wide Ionian Sea. Ten thousand luminous animalculæ glittered in its briny depth, as if to rival the bright stars above, while the white columns on a distant promontory,—the last relics of a people, a power, and a creed that have passed away,—the wooded mountains, and the pebbled beach, and Albanian Bova, the towers of Theodosia, La Bianca, and other towns, rose in succession on our view, all glittering in the radiance of that broad and lovely moon.

A guitar broke the silence, accompanied by a clear voice: it was young Vinoni, chanting a verse of Pignotti's "Novella," beginning with "Donne leggiadre, allorche," &c.

"Woman enchanting! when I look on thy form,
And behold the soft graces of lip, cheek, and hair;
And thy bosom of snow, nature's loveliest charm,
Ah! who would not kiss it, and love to die there?
Sweet to behold the unsullied snow!
The dark eye that rolls——"

"Come, come, caro tenente, stop your twangling, and make sail on the galley!" cried Guevarra, starting up from the sleep he had enjoyed under the awning since dinner. "Corpo di Baccho! here comes the breeze at last," he continued, snuffing it over the quarter; "and the tunny-fish—ah! the fine fellows, see how they are passing us in shoals."

Humming "Donne leggiadre," &c., the lieutenant relinquished his guitar, and looked intently over the quarter.

"Ha! Signor Guevarra, I knew that the clear fires of Stromboli betokened something—behold!" As he spoke, a heavy and dense bank of clouds spread from the northern horizon, and gradually veiled the whole sky; the moon disappeared, or shot forth her lustre only at times on the whitening waves; the sea became black, and the land loomed close and high. The mainsail filled as the breeze freshened, and the boatswain warned the slaves to prepare for hard work.

The darkness was now dense, and I felt, I knew not why, considerable anxiety as to the issue of the night. The little captain generally about this time retired to his cabin, to enjoy, alone, his cigar and a glass of *lacrime*, resigning the command to Vinoni. The features of the young lieutenant were clouded with care, or by some gloomy presentiment; he often walked to windward, to watch the weather and look at the waves, which the rushing breeze edged with white. Suddenly he ordered the great mainsail to be furled, and all made snug for the night.

"Out sweeps: give way there forward!" The shrill pipe of the boatswain echoed his command, and a commotion immediately took place among the slaves, who had hitherto been sitting, silent and motionless, in the dark. From the bosom of the startled deep, a fierce yell arose. Imagine my astonishment and the horror of Vinoni, on beholding the galley-slaves, instead of resuming their monotonous labour at the oar, spring up at once from their benches, and rush, some forward and some aft, shouting like devils or maniacs broken loose.

A desperate but momentary conflict ensued: most of the seamen were tossed overboard, while the rest were driven below the forecastle. Vinoni, brave to rashness, sprang to the front of the poop, and, drawing from his belt pistols (which the galley-officers were never without), he fired, and a slave fell bleeding on the deck; then rushing to the swivel-guns, he alued them round, to sweep the waist,—but they were without matches, and useless. Instinctively I drew my sabre, but old Gismondo threw his arms around me.

"Madman!" he exclaimed, "would you tempt the unfettered fury of two hundred and fifty ruffians, the fiercest in Italy,—men whom years of slavery, tyranny, and toil, have transformed into demons? Sheath your sword, signor—I alone can protect you." I returned my sabre to its scabbard, but a groan burst from me on beholding what followed.

"Corpo di Baceho! what is all this?" cried the captain, rushing upon the poop; "eh! a mutiny—a revolt in his majesty's—" in a moment he was borne over, and dashed to the deck by the hunchback, who instantly brained poor Vinoni with one blow of a handspike. With one of his elfish laughs, he was rushing upon me, whirling his club

aloft; and, but for the stern intervention of Signor Gismondo, my campaign and my days had ended together. By what agency he exercised authority over these lawless spirits, I know not, but the most forward of them stunk away, to continue the work of slaughter elsewhere: and frightful were the outcries and din around us, as the task-masters and mariners perished beneath the weaponless hands, and even the teeth, of those over whom they had so long tyrannized. In one minute, the galley was in the possession of the slaves; and the unfortunate captain, his boatswain, and two or three Sicilians of his crew, were dragged along the benches, bound with cords.

"Follow me—this way, signor—ere worse come of your remaining on deck," said Gismondo, hurrying me into a cabin, and shutting the sliding-door. "I will forget," he added, with an icy smile, "how coldly and cruelly you stood by while my—my daughter, was murdered by that high-born ruffian, Bivona. May his race perish, or be followed by a curse to its latest generation!"

"Keenly at this moment do I feel the reproach,—yet what could I do?"

"Had you not a sabre?" he asked, with fierce contempt. "Her death—it slaked not the thirsty vengeance of our accursed chiefs—they sent me to these galleys—" he threw himself on a locker, and covered his face with his hands.

How full of excitement and of agony was that time to me! Sad were the cries for pity, uttered to the pitiless—for mercy from those who had never received it, and knew it not—which mingled with the hideous uproar that reigned on the creaking deck above us. I heard plunge after plunge, as the corded victims were flung overboard by the desperate revolvers, who, to refine upon cruelty, tied them back to back, and so hurled them into the seething waves, without the least chance of escape.

At last, all was silent; the plunges were heard no more, and the last cry of despair had died away on the wind: I heard the heavy sweeps once more dipping in the water, and knew, by the straining of the timbers and clatter of the thole-pins, that the *Sea-Horse* was under weigh again.

"I hope, major, your late companions do not mean to carry me off a prisoner!"

"No," he replied, gloomily, "and your life is safe.

These unhappy men have no cause to be your enemies—you will be shortly sent ashore."

"But how were you all enabled to break loose, as if by magic?"

"The little hunchback, whom I verily believe to be Satan, possessed strength sufficient to wrench his fetters in two; he then stole the master-key from the belt of the boatswain, as he slept beside the windlass; it was handed along the banks of oars—up the larboard and down the starboard benches—each slave in succession unlocking his manacles, until it came to me, when I opened the secured padlock, and flung it, fetters, key, and all, into the ocean."

"And these ruffians——"

"Will form no mean recruit to Francatipa, Benincasa, or some of those other robber chiefs who divide the hills and forests of Calabria among them."

At that moment, we heard the splash of a quarter-boat, as it was hastily lowered down from the davits.

"Signor," said Gismondo, rising, "the boat awaits you, and the sooner we separate the better. A den such as this, crowded with these poor wretches, whom servile labour and the lash have degraded to the condition of brutes, cannot be agreeable to one in the honourable station of a cavalier—a soldier—such as I once was in happier days. Adieu!" he pressed my hand, and led me to the side of the galley, where the boat was held close to the ladder by Frà Maso and three other slaves, who had chosen to land on that part of the coast.

"You accompany me, of course, Signor Major?" said I.

"Never! Broken in spirit—degraded as I am—this naked body—these scars: away, leave me to my misery! leave me! These poor men, at least, will not shrink from—adieu! Signor Dundas—adieu! Frà Maso—shove off!"

Before descending into the boat, I was compelled to deliver up my watch and purse; my sabretache was searched, but returned to me, when found to contain only military letters and papers. I should probably have been deprived of my epaulettes, but, as they were my fighting pair, they had become so tarnished by smoke and weather, that the searchers allowed them to pass unnoticed.

Gaspare Truffi had now succeeded poor little Guevarra

in command of "his majesty's galley," as the reward of his strength and cunning. He was seated in Madonna's niche, on the poop, kicking his heels, swinging his long arms like the sails of a mill, shrieking, swearing, and drinking from a flask of *lacrime*, by turns. About twenty sweeps were manned, but the greater number of slaves were busy rummaging every lockfast place in search of plunder.

The night was black and stormy; not a star was visible, and the dark outline of the land rose up high and gloomily above us. We heard the boom of the white breakers, as they rolled on the rocky and silent shore, and their echoes mingled with the dash of the long sweeps, as the galley was pulled away, and disappeared in the obscurity around us.

When again I met the Signor Gismondo, it was under very different circumstances: more fortunate than myself, he reached Crotona next day, and was protected by the duke di Bagnara, who gave him a command in his battalion of the Free Calabri.

We were soon amidst the surf; and as the boat shipped sea after sea, we were quickly drenched to the skin. While I sat shivering in the stern-sheets, the four rescued slaves pulled on in silence, and with all their strength, lifting the light shallop out of the water at every stroke, in their eagerness to tread on earth once more. How joyously and strongly they seemed to stretch their now unfettered limbs! Having the tiller-ropes, I steered the boat towards a piece of sandy beach, which we discerned through the gloom; and, not without fear of crashing on some concealed rock, I saw its head shoot into a narrow creek, between two jutting crags, against which the eastern current of the Ionian Sea was running in mountains of angry foam. In consequence of the boat's headway, the fury with which she was pulled, and the strength of the current, she was run up high and dry on the beach, with a concussion that nearly tossed us all out on the sand. The rowers leaped up with a triumphant shout of "*Buon viaggio, Signor Inglese!*" and, springing away towards the hills, left me to my own reflections.

Behold me, then, in a most desolate condition: landed at midnight on the sea-shore, in a remote part of Calabria,—the lawless land of robbery and outrage,—then "*the terra incognita* of Europe," minus my valise and purse,

and without a guide. The rogues had stripped me of everything, save Bianca's dear little ring, the diamond of which my thick leathern glove had concealed from their prying eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE THREE CANDLE-ENDS.

For some time I sat by the sea-shore, reflecting on what course to pursue, until the increased howling of the wind, the roar of the surf, and a drop or two of rain splashing on my face, announced that a rough morning was coming on. Not knowing whom I might encounter, I regretted the want of my pistols. Stumbling landward from the rocky beach, I succeeded in discovering a rude flight of steps, hewn in the basaltic rocks which faced the sea; but so obscure was all around, that, on gaining the summit, I knew not whether the dark chaotic masses before me were a bank of clouds, or the termination of the long chain of the Apennines.

In a short time, I perceived a light twinkling through the gloom, and could discern a little bay or harbour, where three small craft lay at anchor, close under the lee of the high land. A narrow path brought me to a neat little cottage, over the low roof of which the vines clambered, mingling with the orange-trees, which raised their rich foliage and golden fruit above the sea-beat promontory. The wind was increasing, the clouds began to whirl and break, the rain to descend, and a single star, red, bright, and fiery, sparkling on the dark and distant horizon, was lost at times, as the billows of the Ionian main tumbled and rolled between it and me. Gladly I knocked at the cottage door, and, after a long delay, an aged domestic appeared at a loop or slit, through which the rays of her lamp shot forth, radiating into the gloom; she seemed unable to understand, and unwilling to admit me.

"Open the door," said a man's voice, "should it be a robber, what have we to fear? I never harmed the brigands, and they dare not to meddle with me."

I expected, from this defying and confident tone, to behold some very ferocious personage when the door was opened, and was therefore agreeably surprised on being welcomed by a reverend old man, with silver hairs, and a most

patriarchal beard flowing from a pleasing and benevolent countenance. It was my old friend, the Basilian priest of Squillaci, and we immediately recognized each other. On my apologizing for disturbing him at an hour so unreasonable, he replied,—

“Say no more, signor; I am the priest of this district, and my door is open to all; from the great lord to the poor lazzarone, all are equally welcome here. But thrice welcome the soldier; for, though now but a poor padre, I have borne arms in my youth, and fought in the wars of Charles of Parma, and I love the sight of a soldier, for the sake of the thoughts of other years.”

In the snug room of the Basilian, with my feet on the fire-pan of charcoal, I partook of a slight supper, and related the seizure of the galley and the destruction of her officers and crew—a tale which filled the gentle old Greek with horror. I then recurred to the urgent nature of my despatches, and the dilemma in which I found myself, in consequence of being stripped of everything requisite to enable me to pursue my journey.

“Keep yourself easy, signor,” said my host; “a little craft, bound northward, put into the harbour below, a few hours after sunset, to repair some damage sustained at sea, and I have no doubt her master will, at my request, be happy to land you at Orotona.”

I was well pleased to hear this. After a little more conversation, the Basilian retired, and I slept till sunrise upon his sofa, with my cloak over me.

The skipper of whom he had spoken came to breakfast with us, and I discovered he had charge of the *seamprova* which had suffered from the *Sea-Horse's* fore-castle gun. Her starboard bulwark and part of her mainmast had been so much injured, that he had run into the little cove for the double purpose of repairing the damage and waiting till the threatened squall blow past.

Maestro Maltei was, as his name imports, a thorough Maltese—quick-sighted, polite, and intelligent. His features displayed all the national peculiarities of his race; the black, shining Arabian eyes, thick lips, and swarthy visage. He was a stout man, upwards of thirty, and clad in a yellow cotton shirt, embroidered on the breast and sleeves; over it he wore an ample vest of red velvet, adorned with innumerable little silver buttons; a long silk scarf encircled his waist, and retained his sheathed

knife, and on his head he wore a long tri-coloured woollen cap, which hung down his back below the waistband of his white cotton breeches. He had rings in his ears, and a rosary round his neck : altogether, Maestro Maltei, though he had much of the pirate in his aspect, was, in reality, as smart a nautical dandy as one could see in these days lounging about the galley-arches at Malta.

After breakfast, he returned on board, promising to send for me when ready to put to sea. Anxious to proceed, I watched from the windows of the priest's house the operations of the carpenter busy at work, though the weather was lowering, and torrents of rain fell at intervals during the day, which dragged on slowly. I soon became heartily tired of the Basilian, who bored me, for six consecutive hours, with an essay he was writing on the lives of two eminent ancients—Quintius Ennius, a Calabrian, the friend of Scipio and Lælius, author of eighteen books of metrical annals, and tragedies, epigrams, and satires innumerable ; and Aurelius Cassiodorus, a Roman patrician and minister of Theodric, who founded a great monastery near Squillaci, where he wrote a history of the Goths.

Politeness compelled me to endure complacently the learned pedantry of the reverend father, to whose hospitality I was so much indebted ; but I rejoiced when the bare-legged mate of the *Santelmo* approached with the information that she was ready to put to sea. Immediately after dinner, I went on board, with my ears ringing with the Grecian's sonorous voice, and the epigrams, satires, and witty sayings of the immortal Quintina, whom I had never heard of before, and have seldom heard of since.

The weather, which had been alternately cloudy and sunny, now settled down into a dull grey evening ; the whole sky became canopied by dusky vapour, which towards sunset was streaked with a pale, stormy yellow ; the saffron sun was seen for a few minutes, as it sank behind the hills of Oppido, and, as the light died away, the sea turned gloomy and black. The wind blew in gusts, and the billows rolled on the beach with a hollow sound : everything betokened a rough night ; but the Maltese were ready for sea, and the warps were cast off. I had some misgivings about sailing in such weather, but concealed my anxiety. The other two craft, a xebecque and a sloop, remained at

anchor, and their crews showed no sign of preparing for sea. I spoke of this to Maestro Maltei, and asked if he thought they expected rough weather.

"Probably they do, signor," said he, removing his cigar, as he walked to and fro on the weather side of the quarter-deck, while the fleet schooner flew onward, straining under her bellying canvas. "The masters are timid Venetians, and the sailors tremble for their share of the cargo."

"Then stormy weather is expected?"

"Doubtless we shall have a dirty night; but, having repaired all the damage done by that cursed shot, and, moreover, having received from my very good friend, the Basilian father, three sacred wax candles, which have burned before the shrine of Our Lady of Bova, after being duly blessed and sanctified by the bishop of Cosenza——"

"And with these——"

"We light our binnacle, and no danger can overwhelm us."

"On the faith of these, you put to sea on a stormy night! —three old candle-ends——"

"Undoubtedly, signor," said he, turning away abruptly, while I was equally annoyed by his folly and ignorance.

The *Santelmo*, as she was named, was a smart little schooner, with a lofty, tapering mainmast; she was broad in the beam, but sharp at the bows, where an image of her saintly patron spread his arms above the deep. Her well-scrubbed decks were flush and white, while the brass plates on her four carronades, her binnacle-lamps, and the copper on her sides, were all polished, and shone like burnished gold. She was gaudily painted, and straight as a lance from stem to stern. With all her snowy canvas set, we ran along the coast, favoured by the land-breeze, and soon saw the lights of Gierazzo and the Locrian temples of Palepoli vanish behind us in the dusk. Upon a wind, the *Santelmo* sailed admirably, and midnight saw us far beyond the Capo Stilo; but the breeze had increased so much, that, notwithstanding his intense faith in the candle-ends, Maltei was obliged to take in sail. Still more tough grew the gale; the night became darker; the high outline of the Calabrian hills could be discerned no more, and the breaking sea was covered with white foam. The miraculous candles had been lighted in the binnacle with

great formality by the cabin-boy, on his bare knees, imploring, at the same time, in the names of St. Elmo and St. John of Malta, a peaceful night for the master and crew.

The blessed candles burned and sputtered merrily; the bushy-whiskered and grim-visaged timoniere hitched up his cotton breeches, twitched down the net which confined his long black hair, and grasped the helm in confident silence. But harder blew the wind; it roared through the rigging, and the *Santelmo* was soon flying through the rolling sea, stripped of half her canvas.

The mate slung himself from the spritsail-yard, and, when endeavouring to place a candle in the hand of the image on the cutwater, dropped overboard, and (poor fellow!) was seen no more. The sailors now became excited.

"Clew up the fore-topsail—in with the fore-staysail! Saints and devils! be quick, will you!" yelled Maltei, through his speaking-trumpet. "Close reef the foresail, and take in everything else fore and aft. Per Baccho!—Our blessed Lady!—Devil in hell! Look sharp, will ye! Quick, there, or I will shoot the last man off the deck. Away, aloft, while ye can get out on the yard!" But not a man would venture, and Maltei might as well have roared to the wind.

"Corpo! you blundering asses, let all go by the sheets, then. Apostles and angels! Quick, cowards! let fly, or the masts will go by the board."

The order was obeyed; the cordage rattled, the blocks shrieked, the canvas flew to leeward, split to ribands, which crackled and lashed the rigging as they flapped on the furious wind; but we escaped a capsize, and the schooner skimmed along under her close-reefed foresail, while Maltei took the tiller, and strove to keep her to her course, swearing and praying by turns.

The loss of the mate and the increasing tempest rendered all gloomy and discontented. Anon, there was a cry. I instinctively grasped the bulwarks. A tremendous sea was shipped; it swept over the whole deck, washing three sailors, the long boat, all the spare booms and spars, overboard; also the binnacle, with the compass and—horror of horrors!—the three miraculous candles, which were extinguished in an instant.

A howl of dismay burst from the Maltese, who from that

time seemed to abandon all hope and exertion. For a moment, the schooner staggered and stood still; had such another sea burst over her, she must have foundered; but, saved by her buoyancy, as the water ran off her deck, she again plunged forward on her perilous path. A groan burst from Maltei on beholding the candles washed overboard; he quitted the helm, and abandoned the schooner to her fate.

"Signor Maltei—Padrone di Vascello—madman and blockhead!" I exclaimed, rushing towards the tiller, which snapped its ropes and was dashed to pieces in an instant. The *Sautelmo* fell away round, and yawing from side to side, flew at a fearful rate before the wind. There was a crash! the foremast went by the board, bringing the main-topmast down with it; the wreck fell to leeward, and was swept away astern, while the vessel lay a helpless log upon the sea, tossing about like a cork, and exposed continually to the waves, which hurried on in successive mountains, as if to overwhelm the shattered ship, rolling with fury over the deck, and burying her far into the deep, dark trough of the midnight sea. A torrent of water pouring down the companion-hatch filled the cabin; others succeeded; the vessel became water-logged, and the wood lumber in her hold alone prevented her from sinking.

"Holy Saint Elmo! blessed Madonna! and O Thou, who walked on the waters—who said to the storm, 'Be still,' and it was still—look upon us!" cried the survivors of the crew.

"Master Maltei," said I, bitterly, "you have thrown away your vessel, and the lives of all on board, by your despicable ignorance and want of seamanship. Your crew are cowards, and unworthy to sail under a British flag!" He made no reply; but, sunk in gloomy apathy, remained lashed to the capstan, while I secured myself similarly to the windlass; from stem to stern the bulwarks were totally gone, save a fragment which afforded me shelter at the bow.

When the storm lulled a little, I prevailed on the sailors to rig a sail forward with some canvas, and two spare spars brought up from below; and a jury foremast was soon set up, with a dexterity which showed what the men were capable of, if properly directed. Now, once more before the fierce hurricane, the sharp schooner drove on, with the speed of a galloping horse; but whether running

in full career against the rocks of Stilo, or away into the Ionian Sea, we had not the least idea. The seven survivors began to work at the pumps, and we all took heart anew as daylight slowly approached, and the long night, with its excitement and horror, passed away.

It came, the sunless morning—a grey sky, a black sea—a cold gloom everywhere. Afar off, we discerned land on the larboard-bow; but there was not a sail in sight, save a ship which rode securely under the coast, with her top-gallant-masts struck. I had no doubt it was the *Aspasia* anchored off Cape della Colonna, the promontory so close to the place of my destination.

We were drenched to the skin, and had been so all night; we were without food, yet continued to toil at the pumps, which soon, to our great dismay, brought up clear water. The sea having torn away stern-post and rudder, the pumps were our only chance of safety; and the Maltese, encouraged by my example (more than that of their skipper), worked until they were sinking with fatigue. On, on we flew before the sweeping wind, and soon lost sight of—

“Fair Lacinia, graced with Juno’s fangs.”

Once more the mountains sank beneath the horizon, and soon nothing but sea and sky were around us, as we flew before the blast into the Gulf of Tarentum, where we were at the mercy of the wind and tide during the whole of that miserable day. The sailors became dejected; three quitted the pumps and betook themselves to prayer, and the leaks gained on us. Four men still continued to toil, exposed to every wave that washed over the defenceless deck, which was then almost level with the ocean, and the planking was so slippery, that we were in continual danger of being carried away to leeward.

“The sunless day went down;” night began to darken sea and sky, and we contemplated its approach with gloomy forebodings and absolute horror. The *Santelmo* now made less way, in consequence of the thoroughly wetted state of her cargo, which buried her to the chain-plates in the water, where she lurched and pitched heavily. When it was dark, the gale increased; not a star was visible, and the dense gloom thickened in every direction around us.

By breaking through a bulk-head, the carpenter cor-

trived to get up a keg of brandy from the forehold, and with a reckless shout the sailors crowded around him. They drank copiously, and the liquor rendered them mad ; they yelled and screamed, shaking their clenched hands at the storm in defiance, reviling the Basilian and his candles, and cursing St. Elmo, whose head the carpenter clove with his hatchet.

In the midst of this ghastly merriment, while they were dancing furiously, hand in hand, over the slippery deck, a tremendous sea took us right amidship. I saw it coming on, dark, heaving, and terrible—a roaring mountain of liquid blackness—and embraced the windlass with all the strength with which despair and love of life endued me. In irresistible fury, the stupendous wave rolled its mighty volume over the ~~wreck~~; when it passed away, I was alone. It had swept, into the boiling sea, every one of them. A cry came feebly on the bellowing wind, and all was over. I heard only the hiss of the dashing spray, and the plunging of the wreck, as alternately it rose on the crest of a wave, and thundered down into the yawning ocean. I had bound myself securely to the windlass with my sash, and my principal fear was, that the water-logged hull might sink, for in such a sea, and when so far from land, swimming would be unavailing.

O, the multiplied horrors of that dismal night ! How gladly, amid that intense ocean, Solitude, I would have hailed the sound of a human voice—a glimpse of the distant shore—a gleam from a lonely star. Strange visions of home and happiness—of sunny fields and green, moving woods—floated before me. Then came other scenes and sounds ; the boom of cannon and the roll of the drums. Now I was leading on my stormers at Scylla ; anon, I was with Bianca—I heard her soft, low voice, her sweet Italian tone, and her gentle hand clasped mine— * *

CHAPTER XL.

WHO IS HE?

FROM a state of dreamy apathy—a delirium between sleeping and waking; the very fever of desperation—the increased roar of ocean aroused me. Through the sullen gloom I discerned, ahead, a mighty barrier of rocks against which the sea was running with incredible fury, casting the foam of its breakers to the clouds, and hurrying the wreck onwards to total destruction. I heard my heart beat; the critical moment was come, for safety or destruction. I drew off my boots, buttoned up the despatches in the breast of my coat, and casting another glance at that frowning, sable, and appalling barrier of rock, felt my heart sink within me; yet that heart had never quailed in the breach, or on the battle-field.

An exclamation of sincere piety escaped my lips, and suppliantly my hands were raised to heaven. Next moment there was a frightful crash! the parting wreck sank beneath me, the deck split under my feet, and I was struggling breathlessly in the dark water, amid the dashing breakers, which were covered with froth and foam, and fragments of spare masts, yards, ribs, cargo, planks, &c.; from these I received more than one severe blow; while blinded with spray, sick at heart, and trembling in every nerve, I swam towards this black and terrible shore. Thrice my hand touched the slippery rocks, and thrice the greedy waves sucked me back into their whirling vortex; but one flung me headlong forward on a ledge, and I grasped, convulsively, the strong, tough sea-weed which grew on its beetling face.

Fervently thanking heaven for my escape, I clambered up the slippery cliffs, beyond the reach of the breakers, whose bitter and heavy spray beat over me incessantly. After stopping for a few minutes to recover breath, and recall my scattered energies, I ascended to the summit; the level country spread before me, and a few lights sparkling at a distance, announced a neighbouring town. A distant bell tolled the eleventh hour as I walked forward along a road bordered by trees; but my knees bent tremulously at every step, for I felt still the roll of the

ship and the dull boom of the ocean, and the hiss of its salt frothy breakers yet rang in my ears.

As if its object had been accomplished in the destruction of the little schooner, the storm, which had raged so long, now began to die away; the trees became less agitated; the veil of dark clouds, which had obscured the face of heaven, withdrew, and the silver stars were seen sparkling in the blue dome above.

Though rejoicing in my safety, and pitying the poor fellows who had perished, I moved on in dread and doubt, shivering with cold and misery. My uniform was drenched with salt-water, and stuck close to me, and my head and feet were without covering. I longed to learn whether fate had thrown me on the Calabrian shore, or on that of Otranto; if on the latter, I felt certain of becoming a prisoner to the French, whose commanders often displayed, at that time, more of the savage spirit of the Revolutionists, than of that chivalry which distinguished the brave soldiers of the empire. When I thought on the many years of captivity which might elapse ere I again beheld France or my home, I almost regretted that the ocean had not swallowed me up, immediate death appearing preferable to the sickening future I anticipated; hope deferred for years, promotion stopped, and prospects blighted, perhaps, for ever.

As I walked slowly forward, my feet were soon cut by the hard flinty road, which I pursued towards the town. But the appearance of a handsome little villa, in the centre of a lawn, standing by the wayside, changed my intentions; I did not hesitate to approach the house, deeming it safer to acquaint an Italian gentleman with my condition, than to proceed, with the chance of being captured by the quarter-guard of a French camp or cantonment.

Passing through an ornamental wicket, I approached the villa, which was surrounded by a paved terrace, enclosed by a stone balustrade; every window was dark, save one on the ground-floor, which appeared made to open like a folding door. In front of this, a flight of marble steps descended from the terrace, between two pedestals, on each of which reposed a sculptured lion. I stood before the window, between the crimson curtains of which the interior was revealed, and its decorations and

furniture were more splendid than the general aspect of the villa led me to expect.

An aged man, of a venerable, benign, and truly noble aspect, sat near an ebony table, on which he leant, intently reading by the light proceeding from the globe of a silver lamp. He wore a baretta of crimson velvet, adorned in front with a gold cross, and a cape and stockings of scarlet, peeped out from under an ample dressing-gown of faded breccade, which enveloped his person. A few thin silvery hairs escaped from beneath his cap, and they glittered in the lamp-light; his forehead was high and commanding, the curve of his lip was majestic, and there was an indescribable dignity in his whole aspect. His cheek and brow were pale; yet, at times, his eyes sparkled as brightly as those of an Italian girl, as he conned over an old and discoloured piece of parchment, to which various seals and coloured ribands were attached.

I know not what it was that agitated me at that moment, but there was something in the presence of that venerable stranger, which, as it were, drew me insensibly towards him; and all dread of acquainting him with my situation, and intrusting him with my liberty and safety, vanished. Once more, ere essaying, I looked steadily at him. He was replacing the charter in an iron safe, and had drawn forth another, to which a seal, like a pancake, was appended. The light flashed more fully on his features than it had done before; and, strange to say, they appeared to me like those of an old friend, or of one whom I had a dim recollection of having seen before: but *where*, I endeavoured in vain to recollect.

"O, my illustrious brother!" he exclaimed, "though thy gallant heart is mouldering at Frescati, thy memory will be cherished while chivalry and valour are respected among men!" He paused, and lay back in an arm-chair, when I could perceive that tears were running down his cheeks; but the deep emotion passed away, and he again resumed his reading. I then tapped gently on the casement, and lifting the latch, entered the apartment.

"Pardon this intrusion—be not alarmed, reverend signor."

He started; the paper fell from his hand; he closed the safe with precipitation, and grasping the gilded knobs

of his arm-chair, stared at me in astonishment. Certainly, my appearance was not very prepossessing; my old fighting-coat, which had long since acquired a purple hue by campaigning and the blood of wounds, had become of a most unique colour, by being drenched in salt-water. I was unshaven, grisly, and gaunt of visage; minus boots and hat, and my damp hair hung around my face in matted locks.

"A British officer in my presence, and at this time of night!" he exclaimed. "Whence come you, sir?" he added, surveying me with a proud, stern glance, which gradually melted into one more pleasant and benign. "Your name and purpose, signor?"

"Claude Dundas, a captain of the 62nd regiment, and aide-de-camp to General Sir John Stuart, now serving in the Calabrias."

"Stuart—*Stuart!*" he muttered, "the times are indeed changed when—you say your name is Dundas? Which family are you of?"

Though surprised at this question from an Italian lord, I satisfied him; he smiled, and said, "*I know them.*"

"*Illustrissimo*, I have undergone great misery during the past storm in the Gulf of Tarento, and in this condition have been wrecked; I know not upon what part of the Italian shores I have been thrown, but trust to be received with that hospitality which I, as an officer of Italy's ally, have a right to expect."

"Welcome, signor; but excuse my rising. *I never rise, but to equals.* No Briton in distress ever sought succour from me in vain; yet little—little, truly, do these heretical islanders deserve favour at my hands! *Ola, Catanio!*"

He rang a silver hand-bell, and an attendant, or old priest, made his appearance, who exhibited the same aspect of dismay that his master had done on beholding me.

"With us, signor," said my host, "you are safe, although Massena's soldiers swarm everywhere around us. Here you can remain in disguise until we discover some means of sending you to Calabria."

"You speak my very wishes—I am deeply indebted to you! Upon what part of the coast have I been thrown?"

"Near Canne, in Basilicata, a few miles from the frontier of Upper Calabria."

"I am, then, in rear of the French lines at Cassano!" said I, aghast at the intelligence. He bowed.

"Follow Catanio; change your attire; and partake of some refreshment—go! afterwards I will speak with you." He had all the air and tone of a man who through life had been accustomed to wield authority.

"Basilicata!" I repeated inwardly, as we retired; it seemed almost incredible that the water-logged wreck, under a jury-foresail, even when aided by wind and tide, could have run so far up the gulf since daybreak. Her sailing must have averaged five knots an hour, since we lost sight of the Capo della Colonna. Catanio, who by his taciturnity and outward trim appeared to be a monk, led me into an ante-room, where he furnished me with dry apparel. I asked him numerous questions concerning my host, but he seemed very unwilling to gratify my curiosity.

"Signor Catanio," said I, while slipping on a pair of black cotton breeches, "I presume he is a man of rank."

"In Italy, none is nobler; the viceroy of God accepted," he replied, energetically.

"You are an Abbruzzese, by your accent, I think?" The old fellow smiled sourly, and took a great pinch of snuff.

"I am an honest man," said he, handing his snuff-box to me, and bundling my wet uniform, somewhat contemptuously, into a chest, which he locked.

"And my host," I continued, thrusting on a black serge jacket, "he must be a churchman, as he is served by priests; how am I to address him?"

"Italians style him, 'his eminence;' but we, his faithful domestics and followers, —"

"Eminence!—is he Cardinal Ruffo?"

"Ruffo, the apostate!" repeated the other, with such intense scorn, that I was undeceived.

"He is a cardinal, at all events; and I (unhappy pagan!) have been styling him plain signor. Excuse my laughing; but, faith! one feels so comfortable in these dry clothes, after the misery of—but what is this? I am not going to a masquerade!"

"It is our master's pleasure that you attire yourself

thus," said Catania, handing me a cassock and three-flapped hat like his own; "it is your only safe disguise."

"It is just like a snug dressing-gown, after all," said I, donning the garment.

"You are a perfect monk, signor!" said the old man, smiling kindly; "but do not keep your head so erect; that is an old habit. Ah! there was a time—but here are your beads—tie the girdle thus. Bravo! you are a very monk."

"Snuff, grease, garlic, &c., excepted," I thought.

"I am happy to assist in saving a countryman from those false Frenchmen."

"A countryman—what! are you a Scotchman?"

"Born and bred, sir," said he, laying aside his Italian, and, with an effort, recalling the strong northern dialect of his boyhood. "I was called Duncan Catnach; and, in happier days, dwelt near Lochaber, in old Caledonia; which I would fain behold once more, before I die."

The eyes of the old man glistened, and we shook hands with all the brotherly warmth of heart with which Scot greets Scot in a foreign land.

"I rejoice to meet in this place a subject of old George III."

"I am no subject of his! the petty princes —"

"Ha! some follower of Watt, who was beheaded for treason—eh?"

"No!" he replied, proudly and sternly; "I follow no traitor—nor do I participate in treason!" At that moment, his master's bell rang loudly, and he hurriedly withdrew.

CHAPTER XLJ.

THE CARDINAL.

In a few minutes, he led me back to the presence of my host. A slight repast had been hastily laid for me in a snug little library, the walls of which were adorned with a few trophies of arms and portraits, some of them veiled by crimson curtains; but I was too much interested in the cold fowls, the sparkling wine, and other viands displayed on the snowy table-cloth, to bestow a thought upon anything else. On entering, I bowed profoundly to his eminence, who occupied a large gilt chair, cushioned with crimson velvet. Catanio seated himself at the table, to help me.

"Make yourself quite at home, signor," said my host, "and sup without ceremony; being lashed to a wreck for ten hours is enough to give any man an appetite; but excuse my not bearing you company. I have already supped, the hour is late, and I do not usually admit strangers to my table. Catanio, be attentive to our friend."

Catanach—or Catanio—filled my glass with glowing sherry; and long ere the speech of my host was finished, I had dissected the major part of an excellent fowl. My eye fell upon my figure reflected in a mirror opposite, and I could scarcely restrain my mirth: I was a perfect canon, save that a head of curly brown hair supplied the place of a shaven scalp.

"Truly, signor, you make an excellent friar," said the cardinal, who seemed to know what was passing in my mind; "and I doubt not, that were you to resign the sword and belt for the cross and eord, you might rise in our Catholic Church, as many of your countrymen from Douay have done. You must be aware," he continued, after a pause, "that while here, in rear of Massena and Regnier's lines, you run considerable risk of discovery, with the danger of suspicion as a spy. But the ruthless marshal never disturbs my household; and while with it you are safe. He regards me with respect: although his master's iron hand robbed me of the little that war, rebellion, and crime had left me; the poor remnant of the fairest patrimony in Europe."

"I am indebted to your eminence; it would be a death-blow to my hopes to be taken prisoner just now, and would quite play the devil with me!"

"A British frigate often comes up the gulf as far as Canne."

"Ah! the *Amphion*."

"I will send you off to her by a boat: to pass the French piquets at Cassano, is too dangerous a mode of escape. I wish to befriend you, signor, and would deplore—ah! I love the scarlet coat; for I, too, have worn it in my youth."

"A cardinal in a red coat! In our service, my lord?"

"No," he replied, coldly, while his eyes sparkled and his cheek flushed. "No; but when I commanded fifteen thousand French infantry at Dunkirk, in the service of my father, whose portrait is behind you."

From the incomprehensible speaker, I turned to the portrait, which was that of a dark and oval-featured cavalier, in a long wig, which flowed over his steel breast-plate and scarlet coat; his eyes possessed the same keen and proud expression which I beheld in those of the Italian.

"I presume, my lord, you have seen service?"

"None worth mentioning," he replied; and, after pausing a while, till Catanio had retired and the table was cleared, he thus continued:—"And you are a Scotsman? How I love to meet with one! Ah! capitano, the Scots were a loyal people once; but how changed since their rampant Presbyterian priesthood have moulded the nation to their purpose—the designing heretics! Oh, cunning clodpoles! I may live to mar you yet."

"You, eminenza?"

"I," he replied, his eyes sparkling again.

"You have been in Scotland, I presume?" I asked, with an air of pique.

"Never; but the name of that country finds an echo in my heart. Though born a Roman, the ideas of your people, their Lowland nobles, and the chiefs of the loyal and illustrious clans, are all well known to me. Dear to me, indeed, is every inch of the isle of Great Britain,—though, truly, I owe little to the land which set a price on the heads of my nearest and dearest relatives."

"Whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"*Your king!*" he replied, with a deep voice, which caused me to start, as he rose erect from his chair, and his tall and venerable figure seemed to dilate, and his faded cheek to glow. "*Your king, sir,*" he added, in pure English; "one, at least, who should have been so, but the hands of time and fate are now laid heavily upon him. I am Henry the Second of Scotland and the Ninth of the sister kingdom—the cardinal duke of York,—now, alas! known as the last of the house of Stuart. Fate—fate—yes, hardly hast thou dealt with me! Expelled from Rome by Napoleon, robbed of my estates, and driven to penury in my old age, I dwell here in forgotten obscurity, subsisting on that poor pittance which is yearly doled out by the government of Britain. Yet let me not be ungrateful to George their king,—even that he might have withheld from me. A time may come—God hath given, and God can take away. You know me now, sir—let your wonder cease."

As if exhausted by this outburst of his troubled spirit, the venerable cardinal sank back in his chair, while I arose from mine in a very unpleasant state of astonishment, pleasure, and doubt: astonishment at the discovery, a joyous pleasure at beholding the aged and illustrious prelate (even then the secret idol of many a heart which clung to memories of the past), and doubt how to address him, having heard that he exacted the title of "*Majesty,*" which it was as much as my commission was worth to yield him. But a spell was upon me. I had looked on kings at the head of armies, surrounded by their staff and courtiers, and, though banners were lowered, and cannon thundered in salute, to me they were just as other men; but in the air and aspect of the aged Henry Stuart, even in that humble apartment, and surrounded by no external grandeur, save that with which the mind invested him—with no insignia of royalty, save those with which inborn grace and majesty arrayed him, there was a nameless charm, a potent and mysterious influence, which quite bewildered me; and all the romance, the misfortune, the ten thousand stirring memories of the past,—so stirring, at least, to every thorough Scotsman,—rushed upon my mind like a torrent. It was a sensation of happiness, a gush of chivalric sentiment and honest veneration, which accompanied them. I bowed, with proper humility

before the old cardinal-duke, whose proud, dark eyes sparkled again as he extended his hands above my head, and, forgetting his imaginary majesty in the churchman, bestowed on me a solemn Latin benediction.

"Wear this in memory of me." He threw around my neck a riband, to which a gold medal was attached; and, when the tumult of my spirits passed away, and I raised my head, he was gone. Catanio stood beside me.

"Has he not the air of a king?" he asked, while a bitter smile curled his thin lips, and lit up his sharp, grey eye. "You are afraid to answer. You are wearied, perhaps. His majesty has retired for the night: allow me to lead you to your apartment."

In the solitude of my chamber, I endeavoured to unravel the chaos of thought that whirled through my brain. The driving wreck, the drowning crew, and the terrors of the midnight storm—the white salt foam, the roaring sea, the cliffs up which I clambered—the villa, the cardinal-duke blessing me—all passed before me in rapid review. I drew forth the riband and medal, to examine them: the latter was of massive gold; it was one of those struck by order of the cardinal, on the death of his brother, Prince Charles, and distributed among his friends (who even then, as his papers afterwards revealed, were both powerful and numerous), in commemoration of his imaginary succession. It bore his head in bold relief, with the motto, "*Henricus Nonus, Angliæ Rex.*" On the reverse was a cross, supported by Britannia and the Virgin; behind, rose a bridge and cathedral, with the crown of Britain. George III. became possessed of two of those singular medals, but, perhaps, I was the first of his officers who received one from the hand of York: I have preserved the gift, with proper reverence, in memory of an interview which I shall never forget.

Next morning, I was awakened by the familiar but unwelcome sound of drums beating. Dressing in my strange garb, and descending to the lawn, which lay around the mansion, I walked forth to enjoy a ramble in solitude. I looked on my shovel-hat, the serge sleeves and knotted girdle of my strange attire. Three days ago, I was aide-de-camp to the count of Maida, galloping along the line on a garrison parade; to-day, a monk, and a follower of Henry Stuart, the cardinal-duke of York!

The beauty of the scenery and freshness of the morning drew my steps towards Canne, which I beheld on the sea-shore, about two miles distant,—its white walls; church spire, and casements, gleaming in the rising sun. The sound of distant bells reminded me that it was Sunday. The morning was cloudless, the sky blue, the earth green, and glistening with dew; the wide Gulf of Tarento sparkled with light as it vanished into dimness and misty obscurity,—the horizontal line, where sea met sky, being only marked by some sail glittering, like a snow-wreath or white cloud, in the distance. The road was narrow, and, being bordered by thick copsewood, was cool and shady. I wandered on, until a turn unexpectedly brought me upon the parade of a regiment of French infantry, which had just been inspected by Massena, and was being formed into sections, preparatory to marching. My heart beat quick: discovery was death, and I shrank from the lynx-like gaze of the ferocious Massena, who, after a few words with the colonel, galloped off, accompanied by his aide. I began to breathe a little more freely. I recognized the 12th grenadiers, in their blue greatcoats and bear-skin caps, and at their head my old friend De Bourmont, as paunchy and merry as ever. An exchange of prisoners had taken place, and all that we had captured were once more in arms against us. The band struck up, the arms flashed, as they were sloped in the sun, and the battalion moved off, *en route* for the frontiers of Calabria, where Massena was concentrating his forces at the very time our troops were about to abandon the country. How bravely the sharp trumpet and the hoarse drums rang in the wooded way, as they marched through the green defiles! Whilst I listened, regardless of time and place, cassock and cope, some peasant-women approached, that I might bestow a benison on their children; they, however, received only very vague and curious answers, as I pushed past, and hurried back towards the good cardinal's villa, from which I had been too long absent.

After I had breakfasted hastily in my own apartment, Catanio informed me that, as his majesty was to celebrate high mass at Canne, as a piece of etiquette, it would be necessary for me to attend.

"Faith! I have entertained the natives enough for one day," said I. Catanio frowned; and, being obliged to consent, a mule was brought me, and I set off with the

household of the cardinal. A lumbering, old-fashioned coach bore his eminence from the villa, at a most solemn pace,—its little Roman horses appearing dwarfed to the size of ponies beside the ancient vehicle, on whose carved and gilded panels shone the crown and arms of Britain. The old man considered himself in everything a king,—and, doubtless, an excellent one he would have made, if we judge by the goodness of his heart, and the fidelity of his few and disinterested adherents.

That magic influence by which his family always gained the unbounded loyalty and most romantic attachment of their followers, he certainly possessed in no small degree: there was a nobility of soul, a quiet stateliness of demeanour, and a pious resignation to his obscure fate, which made his imaginary crown shine with greater lustre; and he passed through life more peacefully and happily, in consequence of taking no active part in the great question of hereditary right, which had embittered the days of his father and brother. His years, his rank, his reputed sanctity, and general amiability of character, procured him the admiration and devotion of the Italians, who were exasperated by the invasion of Rome, and the expulsion of so many ecclesiastics of rank. The crowd surrounding the porch of the church, uncovered, with reverence, as he descended from the coach, and followed by his household,—three old Scottish priests, an Irish valet, and myself,—ascended the steps of the church. On these, crowded a number of wretched mendicants,—a hideous mass of festering sores, ragged garments, black visages, and squalid misery; they fell upon their knees, and, when Catanio scattered some silver among them, there arose cries of—“Viva eminenza! O, the gracious lord! the beneficent father! Viva Enrico Stuardo! Viva la famiglia Stuardi!”

High mass, in its most impressive form, was celebrated by the cardinal. The congregation consisted of the people of Canne, a few ladies, fewer cavaliers, and a sprinkling of the French garrison. Though the church was not large, its ancient aisles and carved roof presented a noble specimen of the old Italian Gothic, exhibiting those striking extremes of light and shadow for which that style is remarkable. The strong blaze of the noon-day sun poured between the many mullions of its stained windows, slanting on the picturesque crowd, who stood or knelt around the columns—on the cavalier in his ample cloak,

the signora in her veil and mantle, the peasant in his rough jacket, and the graceful country girl, with her sparkling eyes and olive cheek, shaded by a modest muslin panno. Six tall candles glimmered before the dark altarpiece; while the altar itself, being covered with the richest carving and gilding, shone like a blaze of glory around the aged cardinal, who stood on the highest step.

The relics of several saints and martyrs, of great reputed sanctity, stood upon it; and an old ragged mantle, which hung from one of the columns, was said to be the cloak of Madonna, and to have cured divers disorders, by being wrapped round the sufferers.

My informant was a priest: while speaking, he glanced at Bianca's diamond ring, which sparkled on my finger, and the scrutinizing eye with which he regarded me, brought the blood to my temples. I was also exposed to the watchful glances of a French officer, in whom, to my horror, I recognized General Compere, whom I had met at Maida: some recollections of my face appeared to flash across his mind, and he stared at me with cool determination. Uneasy at the chance, the danger, and disgrace of discovery, I withdrew, by a side-door, into a little oratory, which adjoined the body of the church.

"Reverend father," said a man, advancing with a bunch of keys, "are you the Frà Sermonello, whom his eminence has deputed to visit the chapel of the penitents?"

"To be sure, fool! for what should I be here else?" I answered, gruffly, forgetting my assumed character in the annoyance I felt; but immediately adding, "of course, my son, I am come to visit these unfortunate devils—heretics, I mean."

"This way, then, Signor Canonico," said he, with an air which showed he had no great veneration for my sanctity.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FIRST PENITENT—THE NUN.

"A CURSED scrape!" thought I, whilst following him through a little side-door of iron, which creaked on its rusty hinges, as it rolled slowly back, revealing a long passage, dark and mysterious as any in the pages of "Anne Radcliffe," and interrupted by flights of steps, where we required a lamp to aid us in descending. The black walls were covered with glistening slime, and reflected the flashes of the lamp, which flickered and almost expired, as it struggled with the noxious vapours floating through these dismal vaults, and I became chilled with cold as we descended. An iron grate or portcullis, which barred our way, was raised up in a sliding groove by my guide, who requested me to pass, and, saying he would await me there, gave me his lamp.

Many tales of the holy office, and of the bigoted ferocity of Italian monks, flashed on my remembrance. Perhaps I was in a snare! Doubtful whether to proceed, or knock the fellow down and regain the church, even at the risk of being discovered by General Compere, I stood for a moment irresolute; but I had no secret enemy there, and the cardinal was a powerful friend.

"Father," said my guide, "you are a stranger here?"

"I am in these vaults for the first time."

"They contain three penitents; first, a nun, who broke her vows, and lies sneezing and coughing in the cell just before you. Poor girl! she has been here three weeks, and likes her quarters no better than the first house she saw them; *maladetto!* you may hear how she moans. Opposite, lies the cell of a mad cavalier, who is chained like a tiger—my lord bishop intends confining him here for life; and next his cell is that of a monk, sent hither for living too joyous a life—gaming and drinking with gay damsels, when he should have been snug in his dormitory."

"I have a project," said I; "leave me the keys. On my return, I will deposit them in the niche at the chapel door."

"That was old Frà Grasso's way," replied the keeper or warder, and, doffing his hat, withdrew.

"Now, were there a thousand prisoners here, I should set every one of them free!" I exclaimed, while hurrying along the passage, lamp in hand, execrating the cruelty of that tyrannical prelate, who confined three human beings in a place which I could not contemplate without a shudder. The low, narrow passage was arched by rough stone groins, springing from corbelled heads, hideous as those of demons, that projected from walls, through the joints of which the damp, reeking slime had been distilling for ages; innumerable stalactites hung long and pendent, like foul icicles; enormous fungi flourished luxuriantly on the sable masonry; large bloated toads croaked on the slippery floors; rats peeped forth from holes and corners, and the whistling bat flitted to and fro on the cold vapours of those dripping dungeons.

Before me lay the cell of the nun; intending to visit her first, I unlocked with great difficulty the oaken door, and entered. Accustomed to the gloom, I could survey the whole place at a glance; it was a dark, cold, and comfortless den, about sixteen feet square, and had a narrow, zigzag loop-hole opening high in the wall, which admitted little air and less light. Crouching upon a bundle of straw, in a corner of that detestable place, lay the poor nun, wasted and worn, pale and ghastly. Her eyes were raised to heaven; and though her lips moved not, she was praying, but in that still voice which God alone can hear. At the sound of my steps, she turned on me an apathetic stare, and her sunken eyes sparkled wildly between the long dishevelled masses of her raven hair, which wandered over her bare bosom and shoulders. She was almost destitute of covering, having, I believe, no other garment than a gown of black serge, which was torn in many places, revealing her pure white skin, that gleamed like alabaster through the gloom.

"Oh, pity, pity! for the gentle love of God!" she exclaimed; and added, with a shriek, "Ah! it is the bishop—again—again!"

Shuddering, she hid her face in her long hair, and began to weep as if her heart would burst. Approaching her, I laid my hand kindly on her soft shoulder, and said—

"Poor woman! be comforted; you are not entirely forsaken——"

"Begone!" she exclaimed, spitting upon me; "away, priests of hell, who murdered my love—my husband!"

Away, lest I tear you with my teeth! Ha! ha! madness is coming fast upon me! Oh, joy, Jesu Christo! my brain begins to wander."

"Signora——"

"Preach on—of what? religion—and in this dungeon!—in which religion has consigned me to darkness, solitude, and horror. Oh! the soul-sinking misery I have endured these many, many weeks! My husband—who murdered him before my face?—A priest. Who would have dishonoured me?—A priest! Ha, away to your tyrant bishop! I will commune with God, without the medium of wretches such as thee!"

"Lady, I am no priest," I replied, deeply touched by her misery and piercing voice. "I am a soldier—a gentleman in disguise. Trust me, and you may yet escape, to be free and happy."

As I spoke, she rose from the floor, grasped my arm with convulsive energy, and gazed upon my face with a searching glance, as if she would read the inmost secrets of my breast; she passed her hand across my head and face, to assure herself my figure was not a vision; her whole arm was thus revealed, and, though attenuated, its purity was dazzling.

"Oh, signor! dear and good signor! oh, if you should deceive me!" she exclaimed, clinging to my hand, and weeping bitterly. "O, if you should be but some emissary from the accursed bishop! At times he comes, like an evil genius, to offer me freedom. Ah! canst thou guess its price? I will not go with thee—away! leave me!"

"Can there be greater misery than that which you now endure?"

"No, no; there cannot! Who can live without hope? yet all fled from me! Oh, my Luigi! hadst thou been living, I had not been forgotten, to perish thus! My sisters ——"

"Luigi!" I reiterated, while gently removing the dishevelled masses of silky hair which veiled her features—a cry burst from me! I beheld the belle of Palermo, the nun of Crotona, the sister of Bianca, who had been so cruelly carried off by the sbirri of this infamous Petronio of Cosenza. "Francesca!" I exclaimed; "Francesca of Alfieri, do you not remember me?"

She regarded me fixedly, pressed her hands upon her temples, and then shook her head mournfully.

‘I am Claude Dundas—the friend of Santugo, and betrothed of your sister Bianca.’ I threw my arm around the poor bewildered girl, whom at that moment I loved with all the tenderness of a brother.

‘The friend of Luigi! O, tell me if he yet lives? Tell me, though the answer should destroy me at the instant.’

‘He lives, signora; but you alone can restore him to perfect happiness.’

She raised her hands to heaven, and an exclamation of pious and fervent thankfulness died away on her lips; a bright blush for a moment shone on her wan, but alas! no longer beautiful cheek, and had not my arm supported her, she would have sunk on the pavement in a swoon. Without delaying a moment, I bore her away, and locking all the doors after me, deposited the keys in my pocket, instead of in the niche. The church was empty, and the cardinal gone. Leaving my charge for a moment in the recess of an old monument, I hurried to the porch; I reeled giddily as the full glory of noon blazed on my sight, so overpowering was the glare of light after the obscurity of the vaults. Hailing a passing calesso, I desired the driver to draw up near the door; on beholding Francesca, he scratched his unshaven chin, and appeared in an unpleasant state of doubt; but on my slipping a scudo into his hand, and desiring him to drive to the cardinal’s villa, all his scruples vanished, and we drove off.

Great was the astonishment of the good cardinal, when I entered the lower saloon or drawing-room, leading the squalid apparition of poor Francesca, who was weakened by long confinement, and overcome with awe on finding herself in the presence of so high a dignitary of the church. She sank upon her knees, clasping my hand in hers, and not once daring to raise her timid eyes to the face of York, who had arisen on our entrance, and regarded us with a stare of silent wonder.

‘Captain Dundas!’ he exclaimed, in a tone which had something of sternness in it; ‘what am I to understand by this intrusion—and who is this woman?’

Francesca trembled violently; she would have spoken, but the words died away in whispers on her pallid lips.

‘My lord—your eminence, pardon me! The case is urgent, and my meeting with this lady so unexpected, that, with your usual goodness, you will excuse my importunity, while I relate as briefly as possible her unhappy story; it

cannot fail to draw forth that gentle sympathy which no member of your illustrious house ever refused to the unfortunate."

This was graciously received; the old cardinal was as accessible to flattery as if he wore a crown; a pleasant smile spread over his features, and resuming his throne-like seat in the large gilt chair, he said, waving his hand,—

"Proceed, sir; I trust I have fallen not away from the ancient virtues of my ancestors. You know the old homely saying,

‘A king’s face
Should give grace:’

and here at least we are a king, and our subjects shall not sue in vain. Catanio, hand the lady a chair, and Captain Dundas will please to proceed."

I endeavoured to raise Francesca; but altogether overcome with a sense of her imaginary unworthiness, in a presence so august, she remained kneeling in painful humility, with downcast eyes and trembling limbs. I pressed her hand, to reassure her; and, recalling all her story, related it briefly, and in such a mode as I deemed would be most pleasing to the ear of the aged duke, and most likely to obtain his sympathy, which the unhappy never claimed in vain.

"De Bivona and my lord bishop did right," he replied, "in capturing this runaway; and the doom to which the latter consigned her, is only such as the laws of the most holy Catholic Church have from time immemorial directed for broken vows."

Francesca trembled more violently, and my heart sank; all hope seemed to die away, when the cardinal frowned on our cause.

"O, may it please your eminence to bend a favourable eye on this unhappy girl! You will confer a boon on the descendant of a family which of old was never wanting in loyalty to your house."

He remained buried in thought for a time.

"Captain Dundas," said he, "I will think over this matter; the bishop may have stretched rather too far that high authority with which the church invests her servants; but this unfortunate sister must return to a convent, and there remain, until her case has been duly considered. My order will assure her of the kindest treat-

ment. *Catanio!*" he rang his bell, and the factotum appeared.

Although Francesca regarded with invincible repugnance a return to a convent, where she would be subjected to the impertinent scrutiny of the sisterhood, and perhaps that of a severe superior, yet it was a joyful relief from the horrors she had endured; I led her away, in tears, and gave the cardinal those thanks which she was unable to articulate. He wrote a brief note to the abbess, which *Catanio* was to deliver. The calesso was at the door, and we drove off at true Neapolitan speed to the Cistercian convent at Canne.

We resigned Francesca to the superior, whom I was glad to find was a short and stout old lady, with double chin, two merry, twinkling eyes, and a visage which betokened the utmost good-nature. The poor girl wept as if her heart would burst, when we prepared to retire; but, on my obtaining permission to visit her often, she became more reconciled. I left the prison-like nunnery, feeling happy that I could thus befriend *Santugo* by protecting his Francesca, and restoring her to light and life: the whole affair had quite the air of a romance. Dismissing *Catanio*, I went to the shop of a locksmith, whom I desired to make three keys like those of the vaults, which were placed in his hand.

He bestowed an inquisitive glance at my curious monastic garb; but, on my displaying a few ducats, readily took an impression of the keys in wax; on receiving his promise that a new set should be in readiness next day, I hurried off and restored the originals to the niche where I had promised to deposit them.

I was overjoyed to find the venerable cardinal so much interested in Francesca's favour, that he forthwith despatched a courier to Rome, praying for her dispensation, which I then considered as certain, his influence with Pope Pius being so great, that a boon so trifling as loosening the vows of a nun could not be refused him. I knew not how to express my thanks; he was conferring as great a gift on me as on the visconte, and I contemplated with joy the happiness our return would diffuse at the Villa d'Alfieri, when I restored a bride to the arms of Luigi; while, in return, he—but let me not anticipate that, for fear of a disappointment.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A CHANCE OF ESCAPE LOST.

A WEEK slipped away; I visited Francesca every morning, and saw, with pleasure, the bloom returning to her faded cheek, and the lustre to her sunken eye; yet I spoke not of the dispensation, while there was the least chance of a miscarriage; knowing that she was too weak to stand many alternate shocks of grief and joy.

Notwithstanding the gracious manner and winning kindness and hospitality of the cardinal—who appeared to possess that charm hereditary in his family, by which he gained the hearts of all who knew him—I was impatient to deliver at Crotona the despatches with which I was intrusted; to fling aside the slovenly cassock, and don, once more, my smart uniform. I grew heartily tired of the disguise, when its novelty passed away; and bestowed many a most unpriestly malison on its ample skirt, when it impeded me in walking.

One evening, Catanio came to me in a hurry, saying “*his majesty* wished to see me without a moment’s delay;” he was most scrupulously exact in styling him thus.

I found the cardinal seated on a lofty terrace, where he usually passed the evening, enjoying the beauty of the prospect and coolness of the air.

“Sir,” said he, “a path is just opened for your escape, and you have an opportunity which may never occur again. The British ship I mentioned to you is again off the coast, and a boatman will take you on board after dusk. There are no French gun-boats in the gulf, therefore you can escape in perfect safety.”

While he spoke, a frigate hove in sight: she was clearing a point of land, over which her topsails were glittering in the light of the setting sun, which was then gilding the glassy waters of the gulf, and reddening, with its last rays, the surrounding shore. It was the *Amphion*; her bellying canvas shone white as snow, as she rounded the promontory, and the evening wind unrolled the bright scarlet standard at her mizen peak; that standard which a Briton never hails with such joyous pride as when it waves in the breeze of a foreign clime. Gracefully the

beautiful frigate came on, with the white foam curling under her bows and rolling past her swelling sides, from which thirty-six pieces of cannon protruded through the port-holes; and we could discern the long flush line of her gun-deck crowded with men.

A smart American ship, which had probably been blown up the gulf by the late storm, passed at a short distance on the opposite tack, showing her stripes and stars. Scarcely had she cleared the *Amphion's* quarter, when a puff of white smoke curled from it, and a gun-shot whistled across her fore-foot, skimming the water beyond. The Americans immediately took this rough hint, and lowered their topsails to our flag—a good old custom of ocean homage, which of late years has been disused.

“For what reason has the frigate fired on the poor merchantman?” asked the cardinal.

I acquainted him with the ancient etiquette, by which Britain compelled the flags of foreign nations to do homage on her wide watery dominions; and a smile of gratified pride lighted up the glistening eyes of the listener.

The frigate would be close off Canne, when she crossed the gulf on the other tack; and the cardinal observed that Catanio would have a boat waiting on the beach after dusk. It was a tempting offer, and a most tantalizing sight to behold within musket-shot a British ship, for whose commander I had important despatches: but to abandon poor Francesca, when I was so anxious to convey her to a place of safety, and to present her in person to Luigi, was a project I could not relinquish. The cardinal read the expression of doubt which my face betrayed.

“Do you not wish to return to your friends and your duty?” he asked.

“Anxiously,” I replied; “but not without the Signora d’Alfieri, whose dispensation you so graciously requested. Permit me to reside here a few days longer—at least, until it arrives—that I may convey this desolate girl to the arms of the only friends whom war and time have left her. You will thus confer another boon, which I shall long remember, though I never can repay.”

“As you please, Captain Dundas. I shall be very happy if you reside with me so long as your duty and inclination will permit you. Happy, indeed! Seldom it is now that

an English tongue is heard among my diminished household ; save when some Scottish priest from Douay, or some Highland gentleman, whom English interest and the change of manners have left uncorrupted, comes here to pay homage to the last of the Stuarts. Yet their presence brings more sorrow than pleasure ; it raises up those airy visions which shipwrecked the happiness of my chivalric brother, and beseeem me not to think upon now, in my helpless obscurity and very old age ; creating a useless longing to behold that isle of which I have heard and thought so much, and which I fain would look upon before my eyes close in their last slumber, and I am laid in the tomb of my father at Frescati."

Thus the good cardinal continued for hours : there was a something in his tone and manner which touched me deeply. Could I listen to his words without sympathizing with fallen greatness, in the person of the last representative of our long line of kings ?

The sun went down, crimsoning land and sea with a warm glow, as it sank behind the hills ; the ocean changed from bright yellow to deep blue, the stars were shining in heaven, and the *Amphion* had diminished to a speck on the distant waters of Tarentum, before the cardinal ended his reminiscences and disjointed self-communings, and leaning on my arm, retired to his apartment. The frigate appeared no more ; but after that evening I became doubly anxious to be gone, and waited with intense impatience the return of the courier, bringing from Rome the decree which would free Francesca, or seal her doom for ever.

Remembering the false keys made for me at Canne, I resolved, in my assumed character, to visit the cells of the penitents, and discover those who were worthy of liberty, and those who deserved to remain in durance vile. One dusky evening, I departed on this mission, with my duplicate keys and a dark lantern, and having my shovel-hat flapped over my face, to avoid observation. The night soon became dark ; not a star was visible, and the wind howled through the battlements of the ancient church, and moaned in its hollow aisles. Had I been timid or superstitious, here was enough, in the horrible aspect of these vaulted chambers, to deter me from advancing ; but in them day and night were almost alike.

I first opened the cell of the cavalier mentioned by the

guide, and on entering, awakened the occupant from a dreamy sleep—a man, although his features were hollowed by long confinement, want, and care; though his eyes were wild and his beard grizzled—the expression of whose face was as prepossessing and noble as his figure was commanding. He was tall and strong in person, but heavily fettered; and his garments were rags, which fluttered in the breeze that swept through his prison; he trembled with cold and debility. Poor man! a captivity of three long years had not inured him to the misery of the den to which the tyranny of a powerful persecutor had consigned him; his manacles clanked as he rose from the damp pavement, and a stern and scornful frown gathered on his haughty brow when he beheld me.

“Reverend signor,” said he, waving his fettered hand, “you may spare me your usual exhortations, and begone; yet think not that I am so hardened as to scorn a Christian churchman. God forbid you should suppose so! but I have nothing to confess, save my abhorrence of these bonds and the foul tyranny which immures me here, in a living grave, from light and happiness; subjecting me to misery, under which, had not my own indomitable spirit supported me, reason must have given way. Leave me—begone!”

“Signor cavalier, speak less angrily; I am not what you take me for, but a friend, who comes to set you free. Remember, signor, that the British are the friends of Calabria, which our victorious army has already freed from the yoke of France.”

“What is this you tell me?” he exclaimed. “British troops in Calabria! And what am I reserved to hear? Naples has again become a province of France! yet not a voice has whispered it to me in this living tomb, where I have been kept in ignorance of all those great events that have shaken my country. From France—again from the grasp of France?” said you.

“From the brother of Napoleon, whose soldiers we have driven from the rocks of Scylla to the hills of Cassano; hoisting the banner of Ferdinand on the towns and castles of the provinces, and gaining one most signal victory in a battle on the plains of Maida.”

“I am thunderstruck! And all this has passed in three years?”

“In as many months.”

"O joy! And you have come to set me free, most reverend father?"

"Yes,—but address me not thus; I am a British officer in disguise, and placed in a most peculiar position," I replied; quite forgetting the part I intended to act, in my sympathy for this unfortunate, whose frank and graceful bearing gained my entire good-will. "This bishop of Cosenza," I observed, "seems a tyrant, of whose cruelty and injustice I have heard innumerable instances."

"A tyrant, said you? Call him monster, fiend, or what you will; the flaming depths of hell contain not a darker spirit, a more designing devil! You offer me life; yet what is life to me now, when every flower that adorned my path in youth has been crushed and blighted, and every beam of joy extinguished, till gloom, horror, and revenge have settled like a shadow on my soul? O, signor! words cannot depict the bodily and spiritual agony I have endured. Ere we go, hear me, but a moment! My story is short, but bitter. Hear it, and pity me!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SECOND PENITENT—THE CAVALIERE.

I AM the Cavaliere Paolo, of Casteluccio, one of the fairest patrimonies in Naples. No young man entered life with brighter prospects than mine, when, at the age of twenty, I found myself master of a handsome fortune and the love of Laura Molina, my fair cousin. I had been betrothed to her in infancy by my father, who, as her guardian, wished to keep her ducats in the family. When at college, the idea of being compelled to marry my little cousin was a source of continual vexation to me, and from very obstinacy made me prone to fall in love with every other girl. My marriage seemed the commencement of something terrible, and I saw with dismay the arrival of my twentieth birthday; when, throwing aside gown and toque, and after spending a year amid the gaities of Florence and Naples, I should have to demand my bride at the convent where she boarded.

"Per Baccho!" thought I; "if this repugnance is mutual, what a happy couple we shall be!"

On reaching the convent of St. Sabina, I found the inmates were hearing mass performed by Father Petronic, the great ecclesiastical orator of Cosenza. I entered the chapel in no pleasant mood, conning over the compliments which courtesy required should be paid to Laura, who I had been informed was the prettiest girl in a convent which was famous for its fashionable beauties.

"Ah! if Laura is like thee, young girl, what a happy rogue wilt thou be, Signor Paolo," thought I, as the veil of a young lady (who occupied a stool near a column against which I leaned) was blown aside, revealing to me a face of such mild and perfect beauty, that I became quite bewitched, and wished my unlucky cousin in the crater of Etna. Her complexion was extremely fair; her eyes blue and tender, and a quantity of light-brown hair fell curling around a face which had all that softness and bloom of feature one might imagine in a seraph. Enough! for the time, she banished all thoughts of Laura.

At last, Father Petronio made an end of his discourse, of which I had not heard a syllable. The people dispersed, and in the crowd of nuns, novices, and boarders, I lost sight of my fair unknown. I turned away with a sigh to visit this provoking cousin, whom I was bound, by my father's will, to espouse, or my ducats would every one be forfeited to the altar of Madonna.

I sent in my card to the abbess, and presented myself at the grate. The Signora Molina was called, and imagine my joy on discovering my betrothed to be the same fair girl whose beauty had impressed me so favourably at church. I conversed with her for an hour, kissed her hand respectfully, and withdrew, thinking myself a most fortunate fellow in being compelled to espouse so handsome a girl, whose fortune was almost equal to my own.

Petronio was the confessor at the convent, and officiated in the same capacity to all the beauties of Cosenza; the ladies would confess their peccadilloes to none other than this celebrated churchman, whose learning, talent, and supposed sanctity, made him the pride of the province: but he was a subtle fiend at heart, as my story will show. He was the confessor of Laura, and to him she confided all her little secrets, until for some cause she dismissed him, and preferred an aged and discreet Basilian. I remonstrated, but she said there were reasons; adding,

with a sweet smile, that I must be her humble servant then, if I would have her obey me by-and-by.

I allowed her to please herself, and passed the time in alternately visiting the convent and my villa, which I was fitting up suitably for the reception of such a bride. The more we saw and knew of each other, the stronger our mutual love became; and often, hand in hand, have we blessed my good and provident father who betrothed us in our childhood.

One night, when returning from a *cappé*, where I had spent some hours joyously with my friend Captain Valerio, and a few of his brother officers, old fellow-students, all choice spirits and roisterers, with whom I had a farewell supper, I had a singular encounter.

It was a lovely Italian night; the brilliancy of the pale moon eclipsed the light of the stars, which disappeared as she rose in her silver glory above the Apennines, and poured her lustre on Cosenza's seven hills—on its steep and lofty streets, and on the round towers of its heavy castello, where Alaric the Goth gave up his soul to God—whilst their giant shadows fell, frowning and dark, on the shining waters of the Bussiento and the Cratia. Midnight tolled from the steeple of Sabina, and the most profound repose pervaded the moonlit city. I gazed on the towering hills, on the wild and ample forest—which in the days of the Brutti extended to the promontory of Rhegium, but is now shrunk to the wood of La Syla—where the wood-cutter and carbonari have replaced the nymphs and satyrs of the ancients; I looked towards the distant sea sparkling in the moonlight, as its waves rolled round the Campo di Mare, and everything slept in silence, beauty, and repose: I was disposed for meditation and reverie—I thought of Laura, and my heart beat happily.

"In three days," thought I, "I shall be married——"

"To Laura Molina," said a voice near me.

I started: some one had spoken, but not to me. I was near the portal of St. Sabina, and looked inquiringly at the stone figure of Bruno of Cologne—could it have addressed me? No one appeared; I paused and listened.

"And this girl is beautiful, say you?" asked a voice.

"Lancellotti, thou canst not conceive such loveliness."

"I would compliment your taste, signor, could I but find you," I muttered, grasping my poniard.

"Again I say, Lancelloti——"

"Sword of Omar! you forget; my name is Osman Carora," replied the second speaker. "I am a respectable Mahomedan. Corpo di Baccho! I swear by turban and beard,—yea, by Mahomet!——"

"Silence, fool! and hear me whisper."

"Either Petronio spoke just now, or Satan himself!" thought I, looking cautiously about me; having a laudable curiosity to discover those good people who took such an interest in my affairs. I retired within the deep portal at the moment that two men stood before it in the full blaze of the moonlight, and I could distinctly hear all that passed. One was a short, squat, villanous-looking fellow, whose red vest, yellow trousers, turban, brass pistols, and sabre, declared him to be an Italian renegade, acting under the Algerine flag in the double capacity of pirate and smuggler. The other was the immaculate Petronio, whose breast was the repository of half the female secrets in the city—Petronio, the paragon of Cosenza,—the man of holiness, and of God!

"I tell you again and again, Lancelloti, Carora, or whatever you call yourself," he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, "that I love this girl fondly; yea, madly; and shall I behold her given up to this chit-face cavalier, and without a struggle?"

"Of course not," replied the other, stroking his beard, while his imperturbable gravity formed a strong contrast to the whirlwind of passion which racked the bosom of the monk.

"For two years I was her confessor. O! the rapture I have felt in her presence. The exceeding beauty of that young girl has cast a spell upon me; I am no longer myself, the cold-hearted and calm-visaged monk, but a jealous and amorous lover. Curse on this robe! which excites only awe and gloom in the hearts of the young and beautiful. When, at confession, she knelt before me, was it not rapture to obtain those glimpses of her soft and snowy bosom?"

"Ay, truly, it was," responded he of the turban and slippers impatiently.

"To look on those bright blue eyes, and the stray golden curls that shaded the dimpled cheek, to feel those beautiful hands clasped on my knee in prayer, though I

dared not touch them. Never before did such a fairy being cross the path of a priest, to wean him from his God, and destroy his peace for ever."

"No, indeed, no; Sacramento! come to anchor, will you? The moon is on the wane; La Sylva is growing dark, the land-breeze is coming, and the *Crescent* lies close to, under the Campo di Mare, with jib and foresail loose; I must sail by daybreak, if I would keep clear of the British fleet, which my prince of crookbacks, Gaspare Truffi, says stood down the Straits of Messina last evening."

"Right before the wind, with studding-sails and royals," said a hideous hunchback, whom I had not before observed, "and if this breeze continues——"

"Peace, imp of darkness! and sheer off," said the pirate, grasping a pistol.

The hunchback growled, and withdrew.

"Prythee, make an end, Petronio, and say for what purpose you have brought my handsome shipmate and me hither. A priest in love is——bah! in time you will tire of this baby-faced girl."

"Tire!" exclaimed the priest——

"O, no!

I ne'er shall tire of the unwearied flame.
But I am weary, kind and cruel dame,
With tears that uselessly and ceaseless flow.
Scorning myself, and scorned by you, I long
For death!——"

"Pahaw! you are mad," cried the pirate, with angry impatience; "quoting the sonnets of Petrarch like a day-dreaming student, when you should act like a man of mettle. Here I am, at your service, mine ancient friend and gossip,—Frà Lancellotti once, now Osman Carora, of the brave xebecque *Crescent*, in the service of his sublime puissance the bey of Tripoli. Thou seest that, while at the summit of my oriental dignity, I have not forgotten thee; but speak to the purpose. That d——d British fleet—quick—thy project——"

"Is—but come this way." They moved forward; I paused for a moment, rooted to the spot by astonishment; and when I darted from the shadow of the porch, lo! they were gone; nor priest nor pirate could I see, though the bright moonlight still shone in full splendour on the tall windows and marble columns of St. Sabina. The *project*

—the very essence of the matter—I had not yet learned. O, diavolo! On every side I searched, but saw them no more; and, with a heart full of anger and apprehension, I returned to my temporary residence in the city.

“And this is the sainted Petronio,” I exclaimed; “in love with my Laura, and leaguings with pirates to rob me of her—curse on his presumptuous soul! The podestà shall hear of what this night has revealed, and he shall drag forth to justice this wolf in sheep’s clothing.” But recollecting that my single assertion could not pull down the mighty fabric of Petronio’s fame, I resolved to be calm, and watch narrowly: three days more would see Laura in my arms, when I might laugh at the friar, his passion, and his projects.

Fool that I was, to be outwitted by a villanous monk after such a warning! Laura’s dismissal of her sanctified confessor was sufficiently accounted for: a dubious glance or word had, doubtless, offended her delicate sensibility, and his visits had been dispensed with for ever.

A thousand lights burned in the villa of Casteluccio, tinting with a ruddy glow the sea and the rocks of Campo di Mare, around which the waves rolled, sparkling like diamonds. Hangings of satin fringed with gold; festoons of fragrant flowers, gilded statues, and vases of alabaster; ceilings of fresco, columns of marble, floors of mosaic, and pyramids of party-coloured lamps, had turned my villa into a fairy palace. Every hall and chamber was gleaming with light, and crowded with beauty and gaiety; while the band of the Italian Guards played divinely in the saloon. The soft music floated along the echoing roofs, and all were joyous and happy. It was our marriage night. The *fête* was superb: six weeks before, the invitations had been issued, and all of any note in the province were invited. The fountains flowed with wine; and the pillared hall was crowded with dancers, who whirled in the airy waltz, or threaded the graceful quadrille. Nor did less joy reign without, where, on the green lawn, lighted less by the summer moon than by the countless variegated lamps which covered the walls of the villa and the trees around it, the young *paesani* danced the gay tarantella to the tabor and guitar.

I was waltzing with the duchess of Bagnara, one of the most famed of our Neapolitan beauties; but I saw only my Laura, who, attired in her white bridal robe, shone

among our loveliest women like a planet amongst the stars. How shall I describe her? Oh, for the power of Petrarch, and the same glowing words with which he described the Laura of Avignon! Not less beautiful was mine, as she shone in all her blushing loveliness; her bright hair waving around her, and her blue eyes sparkling with happiness and love. The duchess, a stately woman, with diamonds gleaming among her raven locks, was managing her train with inimitable grace, and rallying me severely on my want of gallantry, and inattention to her, when the report of a pistol was heard, and shrieks of women followed. The dance stopped, the ladies turned pale, eyes met in wonder, the music died away, and all listened in surprise, which soon gave place to terror.

Headed by a tall and powerful ruffian, in whom, notwithstanding his eastern garb, I recognised Father Petronio, a band of armed Algerines rushed among the dancers with pistol, pike, and scimitar. Defenceless as I was, I sprang to the side of Laura; my brave friend, the young Santiago, interposed with his drawn sword; but he was struck to the earth by Petronio's pistol, the ball of which wounded the fair duchess, who stood near him.

"Miscreant monk!" I exclaimed; but was beaten down, senseless: the last I remember was, beholding Laura struggling in the arms of the piratical priest.

When I returned to this world of misery, I found myself many leagues away at sea, chained to the deck of the renegade's ship, the *Crescent*, which stood towards the African coast; and, favoured by the land-breeze, was then leaving the Sicilian shores behind. Through an open port, I saw the last headland fading in the distance. The deck was strewn with the plunder of my villa; but I thanked heaven that my friends had been left, and that I alone had been carried into slavery. Laura!—had she escaped, or was she too in the hands of barbarians—a slave, exposed to every indignity and horror? I trembled—my heart sickened; I gnashed my teeth, and sank upon the deck in a stupor, caused by rage and disappointment, mingled with love and fear for Laura.

From this state I was roused, by being dragged along the deck by the villanous Carora, who flung me, while heavily ironed and unable to resist, down the companion-ladder with such force, that I lay stunned and motionless. Oh, misery of miseries!—in the cabin of the pirate was

Laura Molina—the girl whom but yesterday I had so joyously and solemnly espoused at the altar of St. Sabina—whom I had sworn to love for ever,—struggling in the strong grasp of Petronio.

She yet wore her bridal dress; but her bloom, her jewels, and wreath were gone. A stranger could not have recognized the blushing bride of yesterday, in the pale but beautiful phantom of to-day! I would have rushed to embrace her, but Carora held my fetters.

"Paolo!—my husband!—save me! save me!" she cried, wildly, stretching her arms towards me.

"Laura, to God alone——"

"Peace!" exclaimed Petronio, grasping a pistol. "Laura Molina, accept of my love, or I will blow the brains of your cavalier against the bulkhead!"

"Thy love!—O, horror!" she raised her eyes to heaven.

"Woman! I am not in a humour for trifling. On the wide ocean, far from aid, you are completely in my power, and must address your supplications to me; for, I tell you, not even heaven above, nor hell below the waters, can save you from me now! Decide—your Paolo, or me? A word may save him, or a word destroy!"

Levelling a pistol, he seemed more like a fiend than a human being: passion rendered his accents hoarse, and his visage black; his bulky frame seemed to dilate, and his breast to pant, while his eyes glared beneath their shaggy brows; and the knotted locks that fringed his shaven scalp twisted like the vipers of Lugano. His right hand was on the pistol-lock—his left grasped the shrinking form of Laura.

"Signora!" he exclaimed, in a fierce, fond whisper, "think of the bright fortune I can offer thee in the sunny land of the Algerine!"

"Holy Madonna, instruct me what to do in this hour of agony!" prayed the unhappy girl, whose excessive misery would have melted any heart, save that of the apostate. "O, my Paolo—thou,—every hair of whose head is more dear to me than my own life, what can I say to save thee?"

"Loved one! bid death welcome, and defy fear; but forget not that you are the wedded wife of a Neapolitan cavalier!"

"Farewell, dearest, Laura will soon follow thee."

"Thou wilt have, me, then?" exclaimed Petronio, with fierce triumph.

"Never!" replied Laura, faintly, as she swooned and sank senseless in his arms.

"Then away to Satan, thou!" cried the priest, as he fired at my head; but at that moment the pirate Lanceloti (or Carora), renegade and ruffian as he was — touched by one of those qualms of conscience which at times trouble even the most hardened villains, or perhaps, moved to pity by the exceeding beauty and agony of Laura — struck up the weapon, and the ball passed through the deck above. The priest turned furiously upon his partner in crime; but the distant report of a cannon, and the cry of "a sail on the weather beam," diverted their mutual anger for the time.

Confused by the explosion of the pistol, I was dragged back to the ring-bolt on deck, where I remained, helplessly, during all the horrors of the battle which ensued. Laura — it was the last I beheld of her — the last! O, Madonna mia! and Thou, whose power enabled me to survive such an accumulation of woe, teach me how, at this distance of time, to look upon the events of that day with resignation and calmness!

The corsair had fallen in with a Maltese corvette of twenty guns, bearing a knight-commander's pennon at the foremast head. She proved to be the *Gierusalemme*, commanded by the brave Calabrian, Marco of Castelermo; and an engagement being unavoidable, the corsair, which had an equal number of guns, prepared for action. Five hundred of the greatest villains under the sun stood to quarters: the ports were hauled up, the guns double-shotted, the tackles laid across the deck, while round-shot, wadding, grape, and canister lay between them in profusion. The crimson flag of Algeria was displayed from the mizen peak. The renegade seemed in his glory, and swaggered about with scimitar and speaking-trumpet; while the once meek and holy Petronio, with a cutlass and priming-box buckled to his waist, officiated as captain of a gun; and Truffi, the hunchback, crawled like a gigantic toad about the deck, bearing an immense basket filled with shot-plugs and oakum.

Thus prepared, the Algerines awaited the attack of the corvette, for whose success I prayed with the hottest fervour.

On came the *Gierusalemme*, the water flashing under her bows, and her taut canvas shining like snow in the noonday sun: both vessels as they neared shortened sail. The first cannon-ball passed close to my ear; and, stupified by its wind, I grovelled on the deck in despair. The corsair, after failing to weather her adversary, steered under her lee.

"Base infidels, surrender or sink!" cried a voice from the corvette, as we crossed on opposite tacks.

"To the tyrant knights of Malta!" bellowed Lancelloti, through his trumpet; "to become their slaves! Bah! Never, while the great deep can hide us, and we can throw a match in the magazine!" After a good deal of skilful manœuvring, the action commenced in stern earnest.

The pirates fought like demons; for slavery or death was their fate if vanquished: but the Christians opposed them with coolness and bravery. The heavy metal of the latter battered to wreck and ruin the bulwarks of the former,—dismantling their guns, and heaping the deck with dead, whom they were soon compelled to throw overboard to clear the way. The enormous fifty-pound balls of the corvette's forecastle-piece, created a devastation, to behold which made my heart leap with joy. The corsair was evidently getting the worst of the battle; her deck was torn up and ploughed in a thousand places, and the white splinters flew around in incessant showers: her sails were blown to rags, her standing and running rigging hung all in bights and loops, useless and disordered; while the blessed banner, the taper masts, and taut cordage of the *Gierusalemme* towered above the dense smoke in as perfect order as when the engagement began.

During this yard-arm contest, my situation was horrible. I was ironed helplessly to the deck, amid all its fury, and was, consequently, unable to fight or fly, to save Laura or myself. Ah! how I trembled, lest the missiles of the Maltese might penetrate the place of her confinement. Incessantly they were crashing around me, tearing up the strong planks, dashing boats and booms to fragments, and scattering brains and blood on every side. The slippery deck was flooded with the red current, which gushed from the lee-scuppers. I was suffocating beneath the corpses which fell continually above me, and shrieked and struggled under the ghastly load: but the ring-bolts were im-

moveable, and my cries were unheeded amid that frightful din. On all sides rang the curses, threats, and cheers of the living, the groans of the dying, the clanking of blocks and handspikes, the rattle of chains, and stamping of feet, mingled with the creaking and jarring of the guns as they were worked on deck, hauled back by their tackles, loaded and urged again to port, and then burst the deafening roar; while the small-arms from fore-castle, poop, and tops, made up a medley of horrors! Riddled below and wrecked aloft, the corsair lay like a log on the water, and the fire of her guns died away.

La Gierusalemme forged ahead and lay across her bows, which the Maltese grappled fast, and the brave cavalier who commanded leaped upon her bowsprit at the head of his boarders. A yell burst from the pirates as the red flag of death floated from the *Gierusalemme*, whose guns, crammed to the muzzle with round shot and grape, were once more poured into her; the tremendous fury of the broadside, sweeping through from stern to stern, killed one-half of her fighting men, and struck consternation to the souls of the rest.

The moment of deliverance was at hand. On came the boarders like a torrent, when a cry of "fire!" arrested the faculties of all, and Petronio, the demon-monk, leaped up the hatchway with a flaming match; he had fired the ship.

"Throw her off—cut the grapplings—man the main-deck guns—fill the fore-yard! Bravissimo, St. John for Malta!" cried Castalermo, as his boarders scrambled back to the corvette, and their foes fought like fiends at the grapnels, that all might perish together. But the Maltese passed from their reach, backed their mainyard, and once more their broadside belched forth destruction on the sinking *Crescent*. Three hours had the combat lasted; the setting sun was now gilding the Tunisian hills and the isle of Giamour.

The corsair was soon enveloped in a cloud of murky vapour, which rolled away to leeward, and Lancelotti, after throwing all his wounded overboard, prepared to abandon the wreck. Concealed by the smoke, the crew crowded into their remaining boats and fled.

O, signor, imagine my situation then! Laura—if she yet lived—and myself, were alone in the corsair, which reeled every instant as the heavy shot of the corvette

pierced her. I heard a shriek from the cabin: another, it died away; O, frightful! The corsair was now a mass of flame. I might have saved Laura had I been free, but ironed hand and foot to the accursed deck—a victim, helpless as herself—I could only rave and pray, until exhausted by the terrible emotions which rung my soul, and half-stifled by the heat and smoke, I lay motionless in a state of stupefaction and misery.

As from an ocean hell, the hot flames burst through every hatch and port; all became red around me—my heart panted, my eyes were bursting in their sockets. I saw the masts and yards blazing and rocking above me; I heard the “vivas” of the Maltese, and the report of the corsair’s guns exploding, as they successively became heated by the roaring and scorching flame.

“Now—I am gone—I am dying—God receive me!” The deck yielded beneath, and I expected to sink to the bottom of the flaming hold; but my fate was changed. At that moment the magazine blew up—a whirlwind of sparks burst on every side, the crackling deck parted beneath me, and I found myself struggling in the ocean; the corsair sank, hissing and roaring, and nearly drawing into her vortex the planks to which I was chained. The bitter briny water rushed in at every pore and I became insensible.

On recovering, I found myself upon the deck of the corvette, from whose commander I received every kindness and attention that the brave can yield to the unfortunate; but I was filled with an agony of horror when I reflected on the past, and the fate of Laura Molina.

Time softened those pangs, and remembering that she was with the angels in heaven, and happier than she could ever have been on earth, I became contented; but vowed never to love another!—a solemn pledge of love and piety, which I have most religiously preserved. To be brief—I served with the Cavalier di Castelermo during the remainder of his cruise against the Algerines, with whom we had many encounters; and the desire of avenging my wrongs endued me with the valour of a lion.

After the blockade of Valetta, when all hope of restoring the order of St. John to its pristine splendour had failed, Castelermo and I set out for Italy, to join the grand-master at Genoa. During the voyage the vessel anchored off the Campo di Mare, and I was seized with a longing to behold

my native city, and visit once more those places which the associations of childhood and love have rendered so dear to me.

On hearing that so distinguished a cavalier, with his his train, was in the vicinity, the bishop of Cosenza invited us all to his palace. It was one of our glorious Italian days; the landscape danced joyously in the sunbeams, the green peaks of the Syls, the spires of the city, the winding river, the waving woods, and the distant sea, all shone in summer beauty beneath the bright blue sky.

The memory of Laura, her beauty, her gentle innocence, our love and our misery, made my heart alternately a prey to the tenderest sorrow, and the fiercest longings to requite her wrongs upon the wretch Petronio.

It was the levee-day of the bishop; a guard of mounted sbirri received us in the porch of his palace. A crowd of richly-dressed cavaliers, officers, and knights of military orders, mingling with churchmen, thronged the ante-rooms, and were introduced, in turn, by the chamberlain. Entering the presence-chamber of the great prelate, I beheld him seated in a lofty chair, wearing his canonicals and sparkling mitre, gleaming with jewels and embroidery. On my nearer approach, judge of my sensations on recognizing, in his stern and sallow visage, the accursed lineaments of Father Petronio. The blood rushed tumultuously on my heart, and all the long slumbering spirit of the devil arose within me.

"Gesu Christo!" I exclaimed, raising my hands to Heaven; "is this one of Thy servants—Thy chosen servants?"

Castelermo arose from his knees in astonishment, while I unsheathed my sword and sprang upon the bishop, alike regardless of his power, his friends, and my life; I trembled, I panted, I thought only of Laura and retribution.

"Hypocritical apostate!" I exclaimed, grasping him by the throat, and dashing his mitre to the earth. "Thou pest of hell! thou murderer of my wife, and wrecker of my peace! have we met at last—ha!"

"Sacrilege!" cried the strangling bishop. "O, gentlemen and cavaliers, save me from this madman!"

"Madman! ha—peace, thou wolf in sheep's clothing! I am Paolo of Casteluccio, and too well thou knowest me; but die, fiend, die!" The strong hand of my friend grasped my descending sword. and the life of the dog

bishop was spared, although I dashed him to the floor with such force that he lay stunned and senseless.

I laughed with fierce exultation, and strove to trample him to death, but was grasped by a hundred hands. All the smothered fury of years had broken forth, and, imagining I had the strength of a Goliath, I thought to burst, like cobwebs, the fetters which were heaped upon me. I was mad—a maniac, and, knowing that I was so, rejoiced when men, who were valiant and strong, quailed before the demon-glare of my eye. The crowded chamber, the gleaming swords, the halberts of the sbirri, the prostrate bishop, and the uproar of tongues, are yet before me, like a dream of yesterday : I remember no more.

When the passion-fit passed away and reason returned, I was here in fetters, amid gloom and woe. Three summers have come and gone since last I saw the sun. * * * O, signor, all hope of life and liberty had faded away, and your presence alone has revived a love of existence, and a wish to look on the beautiful world once more—on its blue skies and green hills, ere death closes these eyes for ever.

The cavalier concluded just as my lamp was about to expire, and the grey dawn was peeping through the little iron grating which lighted his dismal vault. I gave the unfortunate man my hand, and, leading him forth, struck off his rusty fetters with a stone I found near the chapel door. No pen can describe his joy on finding himself free, and breathing the pure air of the summer morning. The sun was rising in all its beauty above the dark-green ridge of the distant hills ; for three years he had not beheld it ; he wept with joy, and, embracing me, declared, with the enthusiasm of his nation, that his life was at my service.

“O, signor ! never, since I stood by Laura’s side at the altar, have I felt a happiness equal to that which animates me now !”

His eyes sparkled with joy, and his haggard cheek flushed. He appeared about thirty years of age, and, but for his tattered garments and matted hair and beard, his features and figure would have been eminently striking and noble. Reminding him that instant flight was necessary, I advised him to join the chivalric Francatropa, with whom he would be safer than in any Italian city. He relished the proposal, as many men of birth and education

did not disdain to serve against France under such a leader.

We parted. Catanio was telling the bell for matins, at the villa, when I returned, and, gaining my room unobserved, threw myself on a couch, and slept till noon. I then joined the old cardinal in his daily promenade, under the cool arcades, on the seaward side of his residence.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE THIRD PENITENT—THE MONK.

THE escape of a second victim from the vaults caused a great surmising and anxiety at Canne; and although, no doubt, the cardinal suspected that I had a hand in the matter, he never spoke of it. The astonishment of the keeper was boundless, when he discovered his charge vanishing so unaccountably; he was accused of conspiracy, and imprisoned by order of the podestà. The poor man defended himself before the tribunal, by laying the blame upon—whom think you, gentle reader?—VIRGIL; who is regarded by the lower order of Italians less as a poet, than as a conjurer and magician, upon whose guilty head the blame of everything wicked and wonderful is laid.

Among the mountains, he has for ages been deemed the architect of every devilish contrivance, every fathomless cavern, splendid crag, fantastic rock, and ruined tower. A long dispute ensued between two learned lawyers, concerning the question whether it might or might not have been Virgil; and the decision was given for the prisoner, on the testimony of the chiavaro, or smith, who declared that a venerable man, with a white beard, meagre aspect, and eyes like living coals, had ordered a set of keys like those produced in court, for which he paid in strange and antique coin; and when he (the chiavaro) looked for them next day, they had vanished from his pouch, showing plainly that they were coins of hell. All present crossed themselves, and the keeper was immediately set at liberty, and restored to his dignity and bunch of keys.

Of the Cavalier Paolo, I had intelligence before leaving Canne. Gathering together a band of those bold spirits who infested the wilds of the Brettian forest, he fired the

palace of his foe, the bishop, who narrowly escaped with a severe bullet-wound, of which he soon after died. For this outrage, Casteluccio had to pay many a bright ducat to the altars of mother church, before he was permitted to resume his place in society, and it was not until the death of Murat that he obtained peaceable possession of his patrimony at Casenza.

Several days elapsed without the appearance of the Roman courier, and I became very impatient to rejoin my regiment. Notwithstanding the risk of discovery, prompted equally by curiosity and humanity, I made a last visit to those frightful vaults, to free the remaining captive.

The stillness of midnight was around me when I entered, but a noisy singing rang through the echoing cells; the measure was a boisterous sailor's carol, such as I had often heard the fishermen singing, as they sat mending their nets on the shore of Messina.

I beheld in the third captive, an Italian, about forty years of age, possessing a powerful and savage aspect, strongly chained to a large stone, which served him for a chair and table, while a pile of straw between it and the wall formed his bed. He was flourishing his arms and snapping his fingers whilst he sang, but ceased on my entrance, and regarded me with a sullen stare of surprise. A large leathern flask, which stood on the stone near him, explained the cause of his merriment.

"Ha! thou curs'd owl, that pokest about in the night, what seek you here, when you should be snug in the dormitory? Up helm and away, black devil! there's no girl here to confess—no one but Lancelotti of Friuli, a born imp of Etna, who will break every bone in your hypocritical body, if it comes within reach of his grappels!"

"The pirate—the companion of Petronio!" I exclaimed; "are you that Lancelotti of whom I have heard so much? Astonishing!"

"Ho! ho! what are you talking about?" asked the captive, rolling his great head about. "I tell you, signor Canonico, that I am Osman Carora, a jovial monk of Friuli—(what am I saying?) yes, Friuli—would I was there again! Never have I seen a prospect equal to the fair Carinthian mountains, and the deep rocky dalees through which the Isonza sweeps on to the Gulf of Trieste. It was my hap to look for many a dreary day through the iron bars of my dormitory on that gulf, and

afterwards to sail, with royals and sky-sails set, every rope a-taunto, and the red flag of Mahomet flying at the fore-mast head. Accursed bishop! I may revenge me yet, if the good friend who brings me this jolly flask every night proves true. Ah, Truffi, though crooked in form and cross in spirit, thou art an angel of light to me!"

"Truffi!" said I; "mean you Gaspare?"

The renegade, moved alternately by brutality, rage, and maudlin sentimentality, burst into a shout of drunken laughter.

"You know him—ha! ha! and are a jolly priest, after all. Alla akbar! instead of a prying monkish spy, I find you a comrade. Thou, who knowest Gaspare, must doubtless have heard of me. He is now in Canne, planning my escape from this cursed cockpit, to which the double-dyed villany of Petronio has consigned me. Gaspare was my stanch gossip in the cloisters of Friuli, and my master-at-arms and factotum on board the *Crescent*; his ingenuity alone saved me when I had nearly fallen into the clutches of the grand bailiff, for slaying the Capitano Batello. Fi! the recollection of that adventure haunts me yet; the glazing eyes, the clenched teeth, the pale visage, and the gleaming sword; the silver hairs, and the old man's blood streaming on the white dress and whiter bosom of his daughter! O, cursed flask!" said the ruffian, pausing to squeeze the leathern bottle. "May every monk and mollah anathematize thee in the name of Christ and Mahomet, for thou art now empty, useless, and upon thy vacuity I cry anathema! Beautiful wert thou indeed, Paula Batello, and too pure a being for such a serpent as Lancelloti to behold!"

"Caro signor, I would gladly hear her story."

"And so thou shalt; firstly, because thou art a comrade of our Apollo with the hump; secondly, because I would like to hear thy opinion upon it; and, thirdly, because I love to have some one to talk to in this blasted vault, whose walls I would that Satan rent asunder and ruined for ever." And, without further preface, he commenced the following story, which deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MONK'S STORY.

THE Capitano Batello was an old soldier of the Venetian republic, who, after an active life, retired to spend the winter of his days among the woody solitudes of Friuli. All the village loved the good old capitano, who made wooden swords and flags for the children, and retailed his campaigns and adventures a thousand times to the frequenters of the cantina, where he was the military and political oracle; and at mass, all made way for the white-haired old man, when he came slowly marching up the aisle, with the Signorina Paula leaning on his arm. The old soldier's doublet was perhaps a little threadbare, or his broad hat glazed at the edge; yet he never forgot his rank, even when struggling for existence with half a ducatoon a day.

But Paula, the gentle-voiced, the blue-eyed and fair-haired Paula, was the admiration of all—the glory of the village; and the old captain watched her as a miser would a precious jewel. Beard of Ali! she would have brought a princely sum at Algiers.

She was beautiful, and her soft blue eyes looked one fully and searchingly in the face, with all the confidence of perfect innocence. Her mother was gone to heaven, as the captain said, when he engaged me as tutor to Paula and her brother, an office for which I received a trifle, that went into the treasury of San Baldassare—a trap which swallowed everything. The boy, Rosario, was a chubby little rogue, and for a time I took pleasure in hearing their lisping accents, as they conned over their task in an arbour which Paula's hands had formed, at the back of their little cottage.

Thunder! how often have I looked back with astonishment on those days, when on the gun-deck of the *Crescent* I stood at the head of five hundred of the boldest hearts of Tunis and Tripoli. Who then could have recognized in Osman, the bloodthirsty, the hypocritical Frà Lancelotti? Yes! I was ever a hypocrite, and regarded with scorn and detestation the sombre garb which tied me to the monastery. But my fate was not in my own

hands ; my parents were a son and daughter of old mother church, and I came into the world very unfortunately for both parties. They threw me into the lantern of San Baldassare, where, thirty years before, my father had been found himself. As a reward for giving me life, my mother died in the dungeons of San Marco, and my father expiated his share in the matter at the first general *auto-da-fé*; so you see that I come of a martyred family.

A prisoner from my boyhood upwards, I looked upon the world as a realm of light and joy, from which I was for ever debarred by those mysterious vows which the monks had induced me to profess, before their meaning was understood. When, from my iron grate, I looked on the vale of the winding Isonza, blooming with foliage and verdure, and bounded by the blue Carinthian hills, and listened to the rushing sound of the free, bold river, how intense were my longings to follow its course to where it plunged headlong into the Gulf of Trieste,—where, for hours, I have watched the scudding sails, till my eyes and heart ached. O, hours of longing and of agony ! To see nature spread before me in all her glory, yet be unable to taste her sweets ; to be a prisoner without a crime. And love, or what the world calls love, I knew not what it was, though a secret spirit whispered within me : I longed to look on some fair face, and to hear a gentle voice reply to mine,—but love's magic, its mystery, and its madness, I was yet to learn. With a heart thus formed, and open to the assaults of that wicked little god,—whom the ancients should have depicted as a giant,—you may imagine my sensations on finding myself in the presence of Paula, whose face and form far outshone the famous *Madenas* of our chapel. A hot blush suffused my cheek, but the fair face of Paula revealed only the rosy tinge of health, and her brow the calm purity of perfect innocence. I was silent and *awed* in her presence : an Italian monk *awed* by a girl of seventeen !

With evening, I returned to the cloisters, and a chill sank upon my heart as their cold shadows fell over me. I was in my old dormitory, where the truckle-bed, the polished skull, the cross, and rough vaulted roof, seemed yet the same : but I was changed. The recollection of Paula's soft, gazelle-like eyes and snowy breast never left me for a moment, and I passed a sleepless night.

"O, that I were a soldier or a cavalier, for then Batello would respect, and his daughter might love me: but a priest—a priest—anathema! anathema! there is no hope for me—none! O, malediction! why did I ever behold thee, Paula!"

Thus passed the night. Noon found me again in the arbour of Batello's garden: the golden-haired and ruddy-checked Rosario was drawing over his task, but I neither heard nor beheld him. I saw only his sister, who, seated beneath the shadow of the luxuriant rose-trees, was immersed in the glowing pages of the warrior bard, Luigi Transilla, the brave follower of Piero di Toledo.

The rays of the sun streamed between the foliage of the arbour, lighting up her fair ringlets, which glittered like living gold; her white neck sparkled in the same mysterious radiance,—a glory seemed around her, and the soft, calm aspect of her downcast face, made her seem the very image of our lovely lady, the famed Madonna of Cantarini. Intoxicated with her appearance, I trembled when addressing her, while she entered frankly into conversation with me, on the merits of the soldier's poems. Full and calmly her mild eyes gazed on mine, yet no suspicion struck her of the passion which glowed within me, and which I dared not reveal, for death was the doom,—on the one hand, her firm father's poniard; on the other, the dungeons of the Piombi, or the horrors of the holy office.

By night, the ravings of my dreams were heard by the tenants of the adjoining dormitories, Petronio, and Truffi the crookback, and they soon learned from my mutterings that I loved Paula, the daughter of the Signor Batello. Petronio,—the same accursed Petronio, who, from his archiepiscopal palace, sent forth the mandate which entombed me here, when, after a tough battle with a Maltese cruiser, I was cast, half-drowned and bleeding, on the beach of Canne,—Petronio, whose matchless hypocrisy makes his villany even of a deeper dye than mine, then came to act the part of friend, to counsel me to destruction, and to become the evil genius of the good Batello and his innocent children.

A thorough Italian monk, dark, gloomy, and superstitious, he was my senior by fifteen years, and had secretly plunged into all the excesses of Venice. Like the fiendish hunchback, he was an adept in every dissimulation and debauchery, and boasted of his exploits, till, ashamed of

my weakness, I took heart, and burned for distinction in the same worthy fields. I put myself under his guidance and tuition : to effect what? O, innocent Paula!

I had resolved, by every art of reasoning and sophistry, to break down the barriers of religion and modesty, and bend her mind to my purpose. But each successive day, when I looked upon her snowy brow, her pure and happy face, blooming with beauty and radiant with youth, my diabolical purpose was left unfulfilled, unattempted, and my heart shrank from the contest.

Sometimes, young and handsome cavaliers, from the castle of Gradiaka, or the citadel of Friuli, came to visit the old capitano, and the gallantry of their air, the glitter of their military garb and weapons, the ease with which they lounged about, strummed on the mandolin, or whispered soft nothings to the fair girl, made my envious heart burn with alternate rage and jealousy. Intensely I longed to be like one of them, and yet I could have slain them all, and Paula, too, when she smiled on them.

But I soon found a more powerful auxiliary to my love, than either Petronio's sophistry or Truffi's villany could furnish: and where, think you? In Paula's own heart. Ho! ho! a young girl soon discovers that which is the sole object of her thoughts by day, and her dreams by night,—a lover! There is a mysterious emotion, so pleasing to her heart, so flattering to her fancy, and altogether so peculiarly grateful to her mind, in being beloved, that she gives way to all the fervour of a first passion with joy and trembling. Ha! thou knowest the hearts of our Italian girls—warm, tender, and easily subdued: what more can lover wish?

The garrisons were marched to the Carinthian frontier, and the cavaliers came no more to the cottage of Batello: he spent the most of his time detailing his battles, and reading the Diaries and Gazette at the wine-house, while his old housekeeper (whom my cowl kept in awe) was always occupied in household matters. I kept Rosario close to his task, and, therefore, had the dear girl all to myself.

What could she hope for, in yielding to such a passion? Remorse, despair and madness! But of these the young damsel thought not then. Ha! I was then graceful and well-looking, and we both were young and ardently in love. My eyes, at one time, my tremulous tones at an-

other, had informed her of the mighty secret which preyed upon my heart, and which my lips dared not reveal, until the rapturous moment when I perceived the mutual flame that struggled in her bosom. Then, but not till *then*, did I pour forth a rhapsody expressive of my love, when, yielding to its burning impulses, all the long-concealed ardour of my heart burst at once upon her ear. Love lent a light to my eyes, a grace and gesture to my figure, and imparted new eloquence to my tongue; I was no longer myself,—no more the cold, cautious friar, but the impetuous Italian lover. The monk was forgotten in the man—my vows, in the delight of the moment; and the lovely Paula sank upon my shoulder, overcome with love and terror. O, hour of joy! when I first pressed my trembling lip to that soft and beautiful cheek. Long years of penance and of prayer, of dreary repining, of soul-crushing humiliation and sorrow, were all repaid by the bliss of that embrace, which I have never forgotten. No! not all the years that have passed since then—not all the dark villanies I have planned and perpetrated, and they are many—not all the dangers I have dared, and they are countless as the hairs of your head—not all the toils and miseries of a life, can efface it from my memory. I was happy then: I who, perhaps, have never been so since.

A footstep aroused us, and the blushing girl shrank from me as the little boy, Rosario, came gambolling towards the arbour, with a chaplet for her hair. I cast a fierce glance of hatred upon him. Even Paula was piqued, and refused to receive the flowers, upon which the child wept, and, pulling my cassock, prayed me to lecture his sister for being so coy.

"Scold her, Father Lancelotti," said he, rubbing his glittering eyes with his plump little hands, "for she will neither kiss me, nor receive my roses, to put among her pretty hair, as she used to love to do."

"Give me the flowers, child," said I: "shall I kiss sister Paula for you, Rosario?"

"O, yes, yes!" cried the little boy, "or sister Paula will kiss you, and then me."

Our lips met, and the agitated and infatuated Paula embraced the child, who laughed, and clapped his hands with innocent glee, and yet he knew not at what. At that moment, the long sword of the captain jarred on the grave!

walk, and his heavy tread rang beneath the trellis of the garden. Aware that, as a priest, I had wronged him in the declaration made to his daughter, and that I had committed a deadly sin before God, I shrank from meeting him, and, leaping over the garden-wall, returned to the monastery, where, not without sensations of triumph, I recounted my conquest to Petronio and the hunchback.

Three days I visited her as usual, and rejoiced in the success of my amour; for I loved her tenderly and dearly. My air was so sanctified, that the most jealous guardian would not have suspected me; then how much less the good Batello, who, by his profession, had been accustomed to intercourse with men of the strictest honour, and suspected no man of duplicity, because his own brave heart was guileless.

My rose-bud of love was just beginning to bloom, when matters were doomed to have a terrible crisis.

One bright forenoon, when Rosario had finished his task, I was about to return to Frinli, and merely bowed to Paula, because her father was present.

"Brother Lancelloti," said he, grasping my cope, "hast heard the news? The senate is about to declare war against the Turks, and the capeletti are to be doubled. Brave news for an old soldier, eh? I may be a colonello, with Rosario for captain! Come hither, thou chubby rogue—wouldst like to be a captain?"

"O, yes, if sister Paula would play with me as she used to do, and kiss me, instead of Father Lancelloti."

"Rosario, what sayest thou?" cried the fierce old soldier, with a stentorian voice, while Paula grew pale as death, and my spirit died away within me; but the terrified child made no reply. The captain's face was black with rage; his eyes sparkled, and stern scorn curled his lip; yet he spoke calmly.

"Go—go, Father Lancelloti, and may God forgive you! I will not require the services of your faithful reverence from to-day. Away—march! or you may fare worse: dare not to come here again; I am Annibal Batello—thou knowest me!" And, touching the hilt of his sword, he turned on his heel and left me.

I rushed away, overwhelmed with bitterness, rage, and humiliation, and hating Rosario with the hate of a fiend.

To Truffi and Petronio my story was the source of endless merriment; the hunchback snapped his fingers, whooped, and laughed till the cloisters rang with his elfish joy. Deprived of my mistress, whom I dared not visit for dread of the captain's sword, stung by the taunts of my friends, dejected and filled with gloomy forebodings, the cloisters soon became intolerable to me. I formed many a romantic and desperate scheme to rid myself of those cursed trammels which monkish duplicity had cast around me in boyhood; but thoughts of the holy office, the Piombi, and the fate of my father, filled me with dismay, and I dared not fly from Friuli.

One day, whilst wandering far up the banks of the Isonza, with a heart swollen by bitter thoughts, I plunged into the deepest recesses, in search of solitude. Reaching the cascade which falls beneath the ancient castle of Fana, I paused to listen to the rushing water, whose tumult so much resembled my own mind. The voice of no living thing, save that of the lynx, broke the stillness around me; the lofty trees of the dense forest, clad in the richest foliage of summer, cast a deep shadow over the bed of the dark blue stream, which swept noiselessly on, between gloomy impending cliffs, until it reached the fall, where it poured over a broad ledge of rock, and thundered into a terrible abyss, whence the foam arose in a mighty cloud, white as Alpine snow. Rearing its grey and mossy towers high above the waving woods, the shattered rocks, and roaring river, the ancient castello looked down on the solitude beneath it. A mighty place in days gone by, it had been demolished by the bailiff of Friuli, for the crimes of Count Giulio, and was now roofless and ruined; the green ivy clung to the carved battlement, and the rays of the bright sun poured aslant through its open loops and empty windows. But the scenery soothed not my heart; I burned for active excitement, to shake off the stupor that oppressed me.

A turn of the walk brought me suddenly upon the little boy, Rosario, who was weaving a chaplet of wild roses and trailing daphne, culled, doubtless, for the bright tresses of Paula. Remembering some stern injunction from his father, on beholding me, he fled as from a spectre. Like a tiger, I sprang after him; fear added wings to his flight: but I was close behind. A fall on the rocks redoubled

my anger and impatience, and I caught him by his long, fair hair, while he was in the very act of laughing at my mishap.

"Cursed little babbler!" said I, shaking him roughly; "what deservest thou at my hands?"

"Spare me, good Father Lancelloti, and I will never offend again."

"Silence, or I will tear out thy tongue!"

My aspect terrified him, and he screamed on his father and Paula to save him.

"Paula!" said I, shaking him again; "thy devilish tongue hath destroyed Paula and me too."

"Spare me!" said he, whimpering and smiling; "and pretty sister Paula will kiss you for my sake."

"Anathema upon thee!" His words redoubled my fury, and I spat on him. The cascade roared beside me, the deepest solitude was around us, hell was in my heart, and the devil guided my hand; I launched the screaming child from the rocks; headlong he fell through the air, and vanished in the cloudy spray of the vast abyss. The bright sun became suddenly obscured by a cloud, and a deeper gloom stole over the dell of Fana; the ruined tower seemed a monstrous head, and its windows invidious eyes looking down on me—the landscape swam around, and I heard a cry of *murder* above the roar of the cascade. The yell of a lynx completed my terror, and I rushed in frenzy from the spot. * * *

I was in my dormitory: the darkness of night was in my soul and all around me; overwhelmed with an excess of horror for my wanton crime, I spent the night in the agonies of penance and prayer, and making mental vows to sin no more. Had the universe been mine, I would have given it, that Rosario might be restored to life. O, that I could have lived the last day over again, or have blotted it for ever from my mind! But, alas! the strong and dark fiend had marked me for his own. Through the silence of the still, calm night, came the rush of the distant river; there was madness in the sound, but I could not exclude it, and the cry of the poor child mingled ever with its roar. Humble in spirit and contrite in heart, at morning matins I bowed down in prayer among the brotherhood. The sublime symphonies of the hymn *Veni Creator*, or of the litanies of our lady of Loretto, the song of the choir and the mellifluous strain of the organ, rang

beneath the vaulted dome like the voice of God and the knell of death; and yet they spoke of hope—hope to the repentant—and I prostrated myself before the altar, tears burst from my eyes, and the fire of my heart was assuaged.

I left the monastery to seek some calm solitude, wherein to pour forth my soul in secret prayer, but my evil genius was beside me, and guided me to detection and disgrace. I wandered on, but knew not and cared not whither, wishing only to fly from the haunts of men and my own burning thoughts. Vain idea! Rosario, as he sank among the spray, his sister's tears, his father's sorrow, were ever before me, and I looked upon myself with horror.

"Good father," cried a voice, disturbing my dreadful reverie; "O, reverend signor, help, in the name of the Blessed Trinity!"

I started with dismay—what did I behold? The white-haired veteran, Batello, bearing in his arms the dripping corpse of Rosario, while Paula clung to him, overcome with sorrow and terror. Even the venerable goat-herd, whose crook had fished up the dead child, was moved to tears; while I, the cause of the calamity, looked on with unmoved visage. Was it an index of my mind? O, no! a serpent was gnawing my heart; I could have screamed with agony, and my breath came close and thick. I trembled and panted while Batello spoke.

"Frà Lancelloti," said he, "thou comest upon me in an hour of deep woe, when I have much need of godly consolation; but not from thy lips. A week ago, we quarrelled: I know the weakness of the human heart, and from the bottom of my soul forgive thee, for in this terrible moment I cannot look on any man with anger. Pass on, in the name of God! for thy presence is—I know not why—peculiarly hateful to me at this moment. Many a dead face have I looked upon by breach and battle-field, but thou—my Rosario—thy mother—" and the old soldier kissed his dead child, and wept bitterly.

The goat-herd, who had been observing me narrowly, now whispered in Batello's ear. His eyes glared; and, relinquishing the body, with one hand he grasped his sword, with the other my throat.

"Double-dyed villain!—hypocrite!—thou knowest of this, and canst say how Rosario died! Speak, or this

sword, never yet stained with the blood of a coward, shall compel thee!"

"Sacrilege!" I gasped, while Paula swooned; "Sacrilege!—I am a priest—"

"Rosario's hand grasps part of a rosary—lo! thy chaplet is broken, and the beads are the same. Speak, ere I slay thee!" and he drew his sword.

Trembling, I glanced at my girdle; but a half of my chaplet hung there; the other was grasped in the tenacious hand of Rosario. Overwhelmed with terror, I attempted to escape; and, in the blindness of his fury, the old man struck me repeatedly with his sword, while he cried aloud for help. Transported with fury at the sight of my own blood, and dreading discovery, I became mad, and plunged yet deeper into crime: closing with him, my strength and youth prevailed over his frame, now enfeebled by age, wounds, and long campaigns; I struck him to the earth, and with his own sword stabbed him to the heart. His blood streamed over Paula—I remember nothing more. I fled to the hills, and, throwing off my upper vestments, wandered in wild places, far from the reach of the Grand Bailiff, who offered five hundred ducats for my head, sent the carbineers of Gradiska and the vassals of the duchy, to hunt me down, and established such a close chain of communication along the frontiers, that escape was almost impossible. He solemnly vowed to avenge the murder of Batello (who had been the friend and fellow-soldier of his father, the old count of Lanthiri), and I should assuredly have become his victim, and been consigned to the gallows or the holy office, had I not been joined by Gaspare Truffi; who, after transferring to his own pouch every bajoccho in the convent treasury, had come to share my fortunes in the wilderness.

Changing our attire, we embarked for Greece; but were captured off Calabria by a corsair of Tunis. Whereupon, I instantly turned Mussulman, and served his highness the Bey with such courage and devotion, that, as Osman Carora, I became the idol of the Tunisians, and terror of the Mediterranean. Enough!—thou knowest the rest. Shipwreck and the fortune of war placed me in the power of my old friend Petronio—and I am here."

"And Paula?"

"Became contessa di Lanthiri, and soon forgot poor Frà Lancelloti."

Such was the story related to me by the third captive whom those vaults contained: I have jotted it down just as it was related to me; but without the many pauses of maudlin grief, or oaths of rage, with which his half-intoxicated state caused him to intersperse it.

I need hardly add, that I left this deliberate ruffian to his fate, locking all the doors securely behind me; and, to make the keeper more alert in future—as I intended to return no more—I left my false keys in his niche in the little chapel. The terrified warder, on finding a set of keys the exact counterpart of his own, declared they must have belonged either to Virgil, or to the devil; they were destroyed, the vaults sprinkled with holy water, and the wizard was seen no more.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was a clear and beautiful morning when I issued forth on my return to the cardinal's villa. As I passed a cantina by the roadside, under a trellis in front of it, I encountered two personages, whom I had no wish to meet on that side of Massena's lines; the surly Captain Pepe, who treated me so insultingly at Crotona, and Truffi, the hunchback, whom I recognized, notwithstanding his disguise—a white Cistercian frock and shovel hat. Draughts, dominoes, and wine-horns were before them; and they had apparently passed the night at the table over which they leaned, sleeping away the fumes of their potations.

As I passed, an unlucky house-dog leaped forth from his barrel, yelling and shaking his chain. The captain, yet half intoxicated, started up and felt for his sword, and I saw a bastia knife gleaming in the long lean fingers of the cripple.

"Corpo!" said he, "'tis only a priest."

"Hola! call you that fellow a priest?" replied Pepe, balancing himself with difficulty; but, drunk as he was, he had the eyes of a lynx, and knew me in a moment. "*Mis à baionettes!* an English spy. Ah, Monsieur Aide-de-camp—villain! Hola, the quarter-guard! Hola! the provost, and the noose from the nearest tree; *à la lanterne!*"

He staggered towards me with his drawn sabre, and I, supposing the cantina was full of soldiers, became alarmed, as the hideous Truffi yelled and whooped till the welkin rang. My death was certain, if captured: not even York could have saved it, or those important despatches with which the general intrusted me. But I thought less of them than of Bianca, life, liberty, and honour. I easily wrenched Pepe's sabre from him, and knocked him down with my clenched hand; his head clattered on the hard, dusty road, and he lay motionless. Truffi rushed on me with his poniard, but I dealt him a blow across the head with my sabre, and he fell prone over the body of his companion.

I fled to the villa, entered unseen, and threw myself panting upon my bed; where, notwithstanding my fears and agitation, I soon fell fast asleep.

In two hours after, I was awakened by Catanio, whose countenance betokened something unusual. My first thought was of Captain Pepe.

"The courier has arrived from Rome, and his majesty awaits you." I leaped up, joyful at being undeceived so agreeably.

"Has he brought the signora's dispensation?"

"His majesty has not said."

My toilet was soon completed, and I was ushered into the presence of the cardinal, who was seated at breakfast. His Irish valet was in attendance. The plainness of his equipage contrasted strongly with the splendour of his pretensions. He was busy reading, and heard not our approach.

"You see him, perhaps, for the last time," whispered Catanio. "Behold? does there not reign around him a mystic dignity that makes him seem as much a king as if he stood in the halls of Windsor or Holyrood? Ah, who can look on such a man, declining into the vale of life, venerable with years, the majesty and memory of ages, without being moved? But this is a cold and calculating age, without veneration for the past; and the regrets of those who love it provoke but a smile from the selfish and unreflecting."

Without partaking of his enthusiasm, I was not a little moved by his tone and words.

"Catamo, place a chair for Captain Dundas," said the

cardinal, perceiving us. "Sir, you will breakfast with me, as I have intelligence for you. Our most holy father has been pleased to dispense with the vows of the Signora d'Alfieri, at my intercession, and on presenting this document to the abbess at Canne, she will be free to quit the convent and resume her place in society. This is the despatch from the *spedizioniere* of the papal court."

I returned thanks with suitable sincerity of manner.

"Zamori, a Calabrian fisherman of Gierazzo, is now in the harbour of Canne with his little vessel, which, as Catanio informs me, will sail in the evening; on receipt of my order, Zamori will convey you to any part in Calabria, or place you on board the British frigate, now cruising in the Adriatic."

"A fisherman's bark will be but a comfortless place on these rough waters for the delicate signora. But O, most sincerely have I to thank your eminence for the interest you have taken in this matter, and the kindness you have shown me."

"Captain Dundas, *here* at least I am a king!" said the old man, whose broad brow became clouded for the first time. "Though exiled, forgotten by Britain, and standing on the verge of the tomb, I will yield my pretensions only with my last breath."

My reply was interrupted by the appearance of six French soldiers, with a sergeant, coming down the avenue at a quick pace, with their bayonets fixed. I remembered my encounter with Pepe, the keen glances of Compere in the church, and all the dangers of my situation flashed upon me: I stood, irresolute whether to fight, fly, or surrender.

"Sir, they are no doubt in pursuit of you," said the cardinal, his aged cheek beginning to flush; "but will they dare to cross my threshold? Alas! what will they not? The invasion of Rome, the expulsion of the sacred college, and the seizure of Pius himself, are yet fresh in my recollection. Catanio meet them at the porch, and in the name of God dare them to enter the house of one of his servants!"

"Alas!" replied Catanio, "let me implore your majesty to pause. We are but three aged and infirm men, against seven soldiers, armed, insolent, and rapacious, as the followers of a usurper ever are."

"This is no time for delay. Away, Captain Dundas!" exclaimed York; "you must fly. Catanio will lead you to the beach ere the house is surrounded. Farewell, sir; a long farewell to you: we may never meet again."

Deeply moved by the old man's manner, I bowed, and, according to the custom, kissed the hand he extended towards me; a massive ruby ring—the great coronation ring of our ancient kings—sparkled on his finger.

Catanio hurried me away, and, by the most unfrequented paths we reached the beach, while the soldiers surrounded and searched the villa.

The cardinal died a few months afterwards, at Rome, in the eighty-second year of his age, and was buried between his father and brother at Frascati. Henry IX. is inscribed on his tomb, which the genius of Canova has adorned with the most splendid sculpture. It is a curious fact, that till the last day of his life, the cardinal was in communication with many men of rank, wealth, and power, who seemed still to have entertained the chimerical hope of placing him on the British throne; and many documents discovered after his decease, and now preserved in our archives, prove that his family had, even then, numerous adherents in the three kingdoms; some of them men whom the government could little have suspected of such sentiments. *Buona parte*, too—that overturner of kings and kingdoms—is said to have expressed a wish to place him on the throne, and, as an earnest of his friendship, robbed him of his French estates; but the star of the Stuarts had set. George III. kindly and wisely passed over in silence the names of those whose romantic enthusiasm, or political bias, the papers of the cardinal-duke had so awkwardly revealed.

I got on board Zamori's little sloop in safety, and, in obedience to the cardinal's command, the warp was cast off, the sweeps run out, and he anchored about half a mile from the shore. Catanio left me, promising to return after dusk with the signora, whom I anxiously awaited, expecting every minute to see bayonets glittering on the sunny beach, or a boat filled with armed men push off towards the barque of Zamori.

The latter was a garrulous old fellow, whose tongue gave me very little time for reflection. Night began to close over Canne, and I beheld its approach with joy; the day had

seemed interminably long. The evening gun was fired from the French fort, the tricolour descended from its ramparts, and I heard the evening hymn floating over the glassy sea from the various craft around us, where many of the sailors lay stretched upon bundles of sails, smoking cigars, tinkling the mandolin, and enjoying the rich sunset of their glorious clime. Sinking behind the mountains, the sun bade us adieu, darkness gradually crept along the winding shore, and white vapours curled in fantastic shapes from the low flats and ravines; slowly and brightly the moon soared into view, bathing land and ocean in a flood of silvery light.

I lay on a bundle of sails listening to the skipper's legends of the young count of Caulonia, who fell in love with a mermaid that arose from her coral cave in the Gulf of Gierazzo, and sat beneath his castle walls singing as the syrens sung to Ulysses, and of the wondrous demon-fish caught in Naples, in 1722, with a man in armour in its stomach, and Heaven knows what more. Hearing the dash of oars alongside the *Echino*, as Zamori's bark was named, and seeing a boat shoot under her quarter, I leapt up. I went to the side, and received Catanio, who handed up Francesca d'Alfieri. The poor girl was so happy to find herself free, and intrusted to my care, that she could only weep with joy, uttering sobs in the depths of an ample satin faldetta which the abbess had given her, with two rosemary sprigs sewn crosswise in front, to scare away evil spirits.

"Farewell to you, captain!" said Catanio, or Duncan Catanach; "do no not forget us, when you go home to the land we love so well."

"Good-bye; God bless you, old man!" I replied, as the boat was pushed off and moved shoreward.

The dark grave has long closed over the faithful Catanach and his illustrious master; but memory yet recalls the old man's visage: I can see it, as I saw it then,—clouded by honest sorrow, and its hard, wrinkled features tinged by the light of the moon.

An hour afterwards, we were ploughing the waters of the gulf, with the broad latteen sail of the *Echino* bellying taut before the breeze, as she cleft the billows with her sharp-beaked prow. Zamori grasped the tiller with important confidence; the crew, his two athletic and black-

browed sons, remained forward, and I seated myself beside the signora, who, permitting her hood to fall back, the moon shone on her beautiful features and glossy hair. So dangerous an attraction near old Zamori disturbed his steering, and the *Echino* yawed till her sail flapped to the mast.

"A sweet face!" he muttered, as the boat careened over; "but it will work mischief, like the mermaids."

"O, signor, I am happy, so *very* happy!" said Francesca; the richness of her tone, and the artlessness of her manner moved me. "Shall we soon see Calabria?"

"That is Capo Trionto," said I, pointing ahead.

"Dear Calabria," she exclaimed, kissing her hand to the distant coast; "there was a time when I thought never to behold thee more! Beautiful star!" continued the enthusiastic girl, pointing to a twinkling orb; "signor, is it not lovely? alas! 'tis gone; perhaps it is a world!" she added, clasping her hands, as it shot from its place and vanished. The increasing roughness of the sea, as we sailed along the high Calabrian coast, soon made Francesca uneasy; her prattle died away; she became very sick, and lay in the stern-sheets of the boat, covered up with Zamori's warm storm-jacket, and a spare jib—both rather coarse coverings for a beautiful and delicate female. At length she slept, and I was left for a time to my own reflections.

About midnight, I was roused from a sound nap by Zamori.

"Look around you, excellency," said he, in a whisper; "saw you ever aught so splendid—so terrible?"

Like a vast globe of gold, the shining moon was resting on the summit of Cape Trionto, which, rising black as ebony from the ocean, heaved its strongly-marked outline against the illuminated sky; its ridge was marked by a streak of fiery yellow. The water was phosphorescent, the waves seemed to be burning around us, and we sped through an ocean of light! The spray flying past our bows seemed like sparks of living fire; the ropes trailing over the gunnel, and the myriads of animalculæ which animate every drop of the mighty deep, were all shining with magic splendour. An exclamation of rapture escaped me; at that moment the moon sank down behind Trionto; in an instant, the sea became dark, and not a trace of all that glorious and magnificent illumination remained behind.

"Have you seen these often, Zamori?"

"No!" said he, shuddering, and crossing himself; "but such sights never bode good. We shall have the French in Lower Calabria soon. 'Tis Fata Morgana," he added, whispering; "she dwells in the Straits of Messina. I have seen her palace of coral and crystal rise above the waves. She is a mermaid of potent power; God send that we have no breeze before morning!"

Cape St. James was in sight when the sun arose from the ocean, revealing all the glories of the beautiful coast and sparkling sea. After the stout Calabrians had knelt and prayed to a rudely-carved Madonna, nailed above the horse-shoe on the mast, I partook of their humble breakfast, which consisted of olives, salt-fish, maccaroni, and sour wine; the signora was too much indisposed to join us.

I looked forward with pleasure to assuming my important command at Scylla, but other prospects made me happier still. I welcomed the freshening breeze, as the little bark rushed through the surging sea which boiled over her gunnels, and roared like a cascade under her counter; while the ruin-crowned or foliaged headlands, and the countless peaks which towered above them, changed their aspect every moment as we flew on. I thought of my smiling Bianca, and hailed with joy the hills of Maida. We beheld the evening sun gilding the Syls, and at night were off Crotona, and saw the lights glimmering in its narrow streets and gloomy citadel, where Macleod was stationed with his Highlanders. Anchored close under its ramparts, lay the *Amphion*, and brave Hanfield's sloop of war, the *Delight*. The sky was dark and lowering, the sea black as ink; everything portended a rough night, and I was well pleased that our voyage was over.

My despatch for Captain Hoste required him to bring round the Ross-shire Buffs without delay to Messina, and the order was forthwith given to heave short, to cast loose the sails, and lower away all the boats.

My old friend Castagno, with a party of the Free Corps, formed the guard at the citadel gate; I was immediately recognized, and, consigning the happy Francesca to his care, beat up the quarters of Macleod. I found him comfortably carousing with Drumlugas and some of his officers, who were passing a portly jar of gioja round the table with

great celerity. When the curiosity and laughter occasioned by my attire had subsided, and when the general's order had been read, I related my adventures, passing over the visits to the vaults, and the discovery of Francesca d'Alfieri.

An hour before gun-fire, the Buifs were all on board the frigate; her ample canvas was spread to the breezes of the Adriatic, and by sunrise we saw her vanish round the promontory of Lacinium. The cavaliere Benedetto, with four hundred rank and file of the Free Corps, was left to hold Crotona; while, by Macleod's order, I took command of a company of those troops which the *Amphion* could not accommodate; that evening, bidding adieu to brave Castagno (whom I never saw again), we marched *en route* for St. Eufemio, where I was to see them safely embarked for Messina.

Thanks to Macleod and his officers, my attire had now become a little more professional; one gave me a regimental jacket, another a tartan forage-cap, a third a sash and Drumlugas presented me with a very handsome sabre, of which he had deprived the Swiss colonel, whom he vanquished at Maida. In this motley uniform, I rode at the head of the Free Company, which formed a very respectable escort for Francesca and her sister, who accompanied us; both were mounted on fiery-eyed Calabrian horses, a breed famous for their strength and endurance. While so many bayonets glittered around them, the ladies had no fear of banditti; Ortensia laughing merrily, made her horse curvet and prance, and lent her soft melodious voice to the jovial chorus with which the Italian soldiers lightened the toil of their morning march. But Francesca was reserved, and beneath her veil I often saw tears suffusing her mild and melancholy eyes.

"Dear Francesca, why are you so sad?" asked her sister; "O, now is the time for joy! See how brightly the sun shines on the distant sea, and how merrily the green woods are waving in the breeze. Most unkind, Francesca! for your sake, I have left my poor Benedetto in that gloomy castle of Crotona. Laugh and be joyous. Think on the happiness awaiting us at home, and the embrace of our dear little Bianca, when she throws her arms around you."

"And Luigi," added Francesca, unable to restrain her tears.

The path we pursued was different from that which I had travelled before, and the intense solitude around it was almost oppressive. We were marching through a dense forest, where not a sound broke its stillness, save the cry of a solitary lynx, or the flap of an eagle's wing, as he soared to his eyrie in the sandstone cliffs, which reared their rugged front above the woodlands. White wreaths of distant smoke shot up in vapoury columns through the green foliage, announcing that the wild contained other human beings than ourselves, but whether these were poor charcoal-burners, or robbers roasting a fat buck on the green sward, we knew not. We passed one or two lonely cottages, where the labouring hinds were separating grain from its husks, by the ancient modes—trampling the corn under the hoofs of cattle, or rolling over it a large stone drawn by a team of stout buffaloes.

Calabria was then (and perhaps is yet) widely different from every other part of Italy; its peculiar situation, its lofty mountains, its dense forests, spreading from sea to sea, and intersected by few roads, and its hordes of banditti, made it dangerous and difficult of access to the artist and tourist; consequently, until the close of Manhes' campaign of blood, it was an unknown territory to the rest of Europe. These circumstances rendered the natives rude in character, and revengeful in spirit, and thus a mighty barrier rose between the lower orders and the noblesse; who (in the words of a recent writer on Italy), "live wholly apart from the people—they compose two entirely distinct worlds."

After halting in forests during the sultry noon, cantoning in villages, and marching in the cool morning and evening for two days, we arrived near Amato, a little town within a few leagues of the Villa d'Alfieri. We were traversing a deep pass of the Apennines, when the evening, which had been serene and fine, became clouded; the lowering sky portended a coming tempest. We pushed on, at an increased pace, to reach a castellated villa, the residence of a Calabrian of rank, which we saw perched on an isolated mass of rock, about a league up the mountains. Striking and picturesque appeared the vale of Amato, as the setting sun poured its last blaze of radiance down the deep gorge, between the dark wooded hills, gilding the crenellated battlements, Saracenic galleries, and Norman

keep of the distant castle, and reflected in the river, which glowed like a stream of molten gold between thickets of sombre cypress and fragrant orange-trees. Gradually the hue of the setting orb changed from bright saffron to deep red, and a flood of crimson lustre fell over everything, tinging the lofty hills, the thick woods, the glassy river, with a blood-red tint, which rapidly became more sombre as the sun disappeared behind the pine-clad hills. Then thunder rumbled through the darkening sky; gloomy banks of cloud came scudding across it, and volumes of vapour rolled away from the bed of the Amato.

"On, on!" cried Francesca; "O, the storm will be a terrible one; feel you not the very blast of the sirocco? Alas! we may die among the mountains. Yonder is the residence of Guelfo, the Buonapartist—ah! the subtle knave! If we trust ourselves under his roof, say not a word of Luigi, and mention not our names. Ah! if he should recognize us; you remember that terrible night with the conciarotti and the mob of Palermo.

They pushed forward at a gallop, and I followed, after leaving orders with old Signor Gismondo, who—as I ought to have mentioned before—was captain of the Free Company, to continue his route, double-quick, to Amato, where we would rejoin him by daybreak next day. Gismondo was now grave, reserved, and melancholy in the extreme; but I was much pleased at renewing my acquaintance with him. Poor man! it was fated to be of short duration. We had scarcely separated, before the lightning gleamed between the splintered rocks of the pass; the air became sulphurous, close, and dense; in five minutes, it was dark; we saw the luminous glow-worms sparkling amid the dewy grass beneath the shady foliage, while ever and anon the red lightning shot from peak to peak, illuminating the scenery with its lurid glare. After scrambling up a steep ascent, the face of which was scarped and defended by four pieces of *French* cannon, we reached the gate of this Neapolitan lord, whom I had no wish to meet again, as his bad political bias had gained him an unfavourable name in Calabria. Numerous towers and curtain-walls of red stone surrounded the building; few windows were visible outwardly, and those were far from the ground, and well barred with time-worn stanchions.

Passing through a gate, surmounted by a wolf's head embossed on a shield, and surrounded by the collar of shells, with the crescent and ship of the Knights Argonauts of San Nicolo, we dismounted in the court-yard.

"Alas! for poor Gismondo and his soldiers!" exclaimed Francesca, as the gates were closed, and the descending storm burst forth in all its fury.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CASTELGUELFO—THE WOLF OF AMATO.

By the barone, a short and meagre little man of a most forbidding aspect, we were received with all due honour and courtesy, and without being recognized; but his residence was so full of armed men, that it could scarcely afford us accommodation, ample though its towers and corridors seemed to be.

"These are Lucchesi, the most hideous provincials of Italy; those wanderers, who spread over all Europe with organs and monkeys," whispered Ortensia, as we passed through the court, which was crowded with the most savage-looking fellows imaginable. Many were half naked, or clad only in the skins of sheep and lynxes, beneath which might be seen the remains of a ragged shirt, a tattered vest, or breeches, once red or yellow; their legs and feet were bare; some had old battered hats, or red slouched caps; but the greater number had only their shock heads of hair, bleached by the weather till it was coarse as a charger's mane, and overhanging their gaunt, ferocious visages, grim with starvation and misery, which ever accompanied French invasion. A few wore the gallant bandit costume of the south, and all were carousing, and filling the hollow towers, the dark arcades, and echoing corridors, with bursts of brutal laughter, to lighten their work; for all were busy, polishing rifle and pistol-locks, and grinding the blades of sabres, poniards, and pikes. My fair companions shrank with dismay from the hall windows when they viewed the assemblage below, and even I did not feel quite at ease; especially after seeing about two hundred stand of *French* arms and accoutrements ranged along the vestibule.

"Signor Barone, you keep a strong garrison here," said I, smiling, while we surveyed the motley crew of ruffians from a lofty oriel: "do you expect Massena to pass the Amato soon?"

"That would be superb!" replied he, with a grin, which revealed his ample and wolfish jaws. "No, no, 'tis only my good friend Scarolla, the valiant captain of four hundred free companions, who is here with his band; we are bound on a little piece of service together. Ha! ha! if that fool Belcastro had not poisoned himself instead of the Maltese Knight, he would have been here too.

At that moment, Scarolla approached: I attentively surveyed the celebrated bandit-chief, whose name, in the annals of Italian ferocity, stands second only to that of Mammone, "the blood-quaffer." He was above six feet high, and moulded like a Hercules; dark as that of a Negro, his mean visage announced him a Lucchese; long black hair hung down his back, and a thick beard fringed his chin. The band of his ample beaver, his velvet jacket, and mantello, were covered with the richest embroidery, and a silver-hilted poniard glittered in his waist-belt. His brows were knit and lowering, his eyes keen and sinister: the ladies trembled beneath the bold scrutiny of his glance, and shrank close to my side for protection, while the withered little barone introduced us.

"Signor Inglese, the valiant Capitano Scarolla; brave men ought to know each other: you are both captains, remember."

"Serving under different leaders," I replied, while bowing, and repressing a scornful smile.

"Superba!" cried the little barone, laughing and rubbing his hands; but Scarolla's brows knit closer, and his eyes kindled at my intendo.

The hall was now lighted by several tall candelabra; their lustre was reflected from the gilded columns and pendants of the lofty roof, and the frames of dark, gloomy, and mysterious portraits of the ancient Guelfi, who seemed scowling from their panels on their degenerate descendant and his unworthy confederate.

That ancient apartment, when viewed as I beheld it, one-half bathed in warm light, and the other sunk in cold shadow, seemed the very scene of a romance; to which the graceful figures of the Signora del Castagno and her sister,

and the picturesque garb of the tall Scarolla, gave additional effect. Nor were appropriate sounds wanting, for a storm raged in the valley below, thunder growled in the mountains above, and the rain rushed like hail on the casements, the painted traceries of which were often lit by fitful gleams of the moon, or the blue forked lightning, as it shot from hill to hill.

Uneasy in the presence of Scarolla, the ladies, after a slight refreshment, withdrew to repose, promising to be up with the lark for our journey to-morrow.

When travelling, or on active service, one is compelled to accommodate oneself to every kind of society, place, and circumstance; and, upon this philosophical principle, I made myself quite at home, and supped merrily with the barone and bandit, of whom the servants stood in the greatest awe. Supper over, wine was produced: however abstemious the Italians may be, I saw no sign of the national trait that night at Castelguelfo, where we drank the richest continental wines, emptying the decanters in rapid succession, as if we had been three Germans drinking for a wager.

Rendered mellow by his potations, our host became talkative; and, in spite of the nods and contemptuous frowns of the impatient Scarolla, informed me that he was collecting men to make a political demonstration, of which I should soon hear at Palermo—an attack on a powerful feudatory, with whom he had a deadly quarrel, which the presence of our army only smothered for a time.

"It will be superb," grinned the barone. "I hate him with the stern bitterness of a thorough old Calabrese. Thrice has he crossed me at court; he caused Ferdinand to regard me with coldness and jealousy; and when all the nobles of the province received the order of San Constantino, I alone was left undecorated, and my name, the oldest in Naples, was forgotten. We have now the country to ourselves; and, taking advantage of the lull, all Italy, from Scylla to the Alps, shall ring with my retribution. Yesterday, Crotona was abandoned to the Calabri; the soldiers who fought and won at Maida have all withdrawn, and there is no one to mar my revenge. O, it will be signal! In their king's service, the followers of my foe are all in garrison at Reggio, and his residence is

unprotected. I have a hundred sbirri well mounted, armed, and faithful; Scarolla has four hundred of the bravest rogues that ever levelled a rifle. Superba! Loyal visconte, beware the fangs of the Wolf! Per Baccho! there shall be a modern feud between the Guelfi and Alfieri, famous as that they had of old—ha! ha!”

“The Villa d’Alfieri is then the point of attack” said I.

“Superba!” screamed the little barone, who was becoming more inebriated; “yes, I will clothe its walls in flames; and, if blood can quench them, then so shall they be quenched. Yea, in blood, shed where my ancestor’s yet cries for vengeance. Viva Giuseppe Buonaparté!”

“One alone shall be spared, excellency;” remarked Scarolla, who was also becoming excited.

“So I have promised you, prince of rogues, as the price of your services. The plunder of the villa belongs to your followers, and to you falls that glorious prize, the theme of our improvisatori, the pride of the Calabrias——”

“Bianca d’Alfieri!” added Scarolla, his eyes lighting with insolent triumph.

“Superb! is she not?” laughed the barone.

“God curse you both,” I muttered, instinctively feeling for my sabre, and gulping down my wine, to hide the passion that boiled within me. I thanked heaven that they knew not of Gismondo and his company, by whom I hoped the villa would be saved from this revengeful rebel.

“When does the attack take place, signor?”

“To-morrow, at midnight. We will burn a light at St. Eufemio that will astonish the good citizens of Messina, and scare Fata Morgana in her ocean palace. You are on your way to Palermo?”

I bowed.

“Say, when you get there, that Casteltuelfo is in league with Regnier, has burned the grand bailiff, and hoisted the standard of Giuseppe of Naples; cospetto! the cross of the iron crown will outweigh the star of Constantine!”

“Success to the expedition, signori,” said I, drinking, to conceal my anger and confusion. “Faith! this is quite a

revival of that ancient feud, of which the improvisatori sing so much."

"And long will they sing of the diabolical treachery of the Alfieri."

"Signor, I would gladly hear the relation."

"You shall, in a few words. You have heard of the famous fighting Dominican, Campanella, who, in 1590, raised the banner of revolt in the Calabrias; my ancestor, Barone Amadeo, disgusted by Spanish misrule, joined him with three hundred men-at-arms; but these were all defeated and slaughtered by the followers of the then Visconte Santugo, on the same field of Maida where you so lately vanquished Regnier. Then commenced the quarrel between the Guelfi and the Alfieri, which, though we never came to blows, has survived for two centuries, and has settled down into coldness, mistrust, and jealousy, intriguing at court, and petty squabbling at home. We are old-fashioned people here; but France holds out civilization and regeneration to us. Well, Messer Amadeo was defeated, and Santugo gave his castle to the flames, so that the Wolf of Amato might have nowhere to lay his head. An outcast, deserted by his followers and abandoned by all, he wandered long in the wild forest of St. Eufemio, until, reduced to the last extremities of hunger and despair, he resolved to throw himself upon the generosity of his triumphant enemy; and, knocking at the gate of the castle of Santugo, craved the insolent porter to admit him to the visconte's presence. He was absent, fighting against Campanella; but Theodelinde, of Bova, his young wife, resided at the castle during his campaign.

"Gaunt, from long-continued misery, overgrown with a mass of beard and hair, clad in the skins of his namesake the wolf, instead of the knightly Milan steel, and grasping a knotted staff in lieu of the bright-bladed falchion of Ferrara—Messer Amadeo had more the aspect of an ancient satyr than a Neapolitan cavalier.

"'Madonna mia!' cried Theodelinde, with dismay, 'Who art thou?'

"'Signora, thou beholdest Guelfo, the persecuted lord of Amato, who is come to cast himself at thy feet. My territories spread from the Tyrrhene to the Adriatic Sea; they have passed away, my people are destroyed, my

castle is ruined, and I have nowhere to lay my head, save in the grave. Though thy husband's foe, take pity upon me, gentle signora: I am perishing with want, for the ban of God and the king are upon me, and no man dares to give me a morsel of bread or a cup of water.'

"Gentle in spirit, and milder in blood than our Italian dames, Theodelinde came of an old Albanian race; and, moved with pity, wept to behold a warrior of such high courage and birth reduced to such exceeding misery. Enjoining her maidens to secrecy, she provided him with food and raiment, and concerted means for his escape into Greece. The unfortunate Amadeo was grateful, and, touched with her generosity, swore on the cross that he would forgive the visconte for all the persecutions to which he had subjected him. That night he retired to rest in peace, beneath the roof of his deadliest enemy.

"Long exhaustion caused a deep slumber to sink upon his eyelids, and he heard not the clang of hoofs and the clash of steel ringing in the wide quadrangle, announcing that Santugo had returned, flushed with victory and triumph, his sword reeking with the blood of the revolted. Theodelinde rushed forth to meet her husband, and their meeting was one of joy; her tears of happiness fell on the steel corset of the stern visconte, and he too rejoiced, for the Spanish king had promised to bestow upon him all the possessions of Amadeo, if, before the festival of the Annunciation, which was but three days distant, he placed the Wolf's head on the high altar of St. Eufemio.

"The gentle viscontessa knew not of this bloody compact, but presuming on the joy and tenderness displayed by her husband, and shrinking from aught that resembled duplicity, she led him to the chamber of Amadeo. He was reposing on a stately couch, and fitfully the beams of the night-lamp fell on his pale forehead and noble features. He started, awoke, and saw—what? Theodelinde by his bed-side, with her stern husband clad in complete armour. Santugo, his barred visor up, regarded him with a lowering visage; while he grasped a heavy zagaglia, such as our extradiots used of old, and which glittered deadly, like the eyes of him who held it. Then Theodelinde knew, by the glare of that terrible eye, that Amadeo was lost, and she sank upon her knees

“O pity him and spare him for my sake ; spare him, if you love me, my husband.”

“But the ruthless Alfieri heard her not—saw her not ; he beheld only the aggrandisement of his power, and hearkened only to the whisperings of avarice and enmity. Amadeo leaped up, but his foe was too swift for him. Hurled with equal force and dexterity, the zagaglia flew hissing from Santugo’s hand, and its broad, barbed head cleft the skull, and lay quivering in the brain of Amadeo. Theodelinde sank down on the floor in horror ; while the visconte cut off the head with his poinard, and knitting the locks to his baldrick, galloped to the church of St. Eufemio, where he flung the gory trophy on the altar. The ghastly skull remained there, on a carved stone bracket, for half a century ; until the cathedral of St. Eufemio was destroyed, on the anniversary of the deed, by the earthquake of 1638. Those who viewed its fall beheld a spectacle which was beyond description terrible ! The earth yawned, and the stately church, with its three tall, taper spires ; its pinnacles, rich with Gothic carving ; its windows, sparkling with light and gorgeous with tracery ; its massive battlements and echoing aisles, sank slowly into the flaming abyss,—down, down, until the gilded cross on the tallest pinnacle vanished. Convents, stately palaces, and streets sank down with it, and where St. Eufemio stood, there lay a vast, black, fetid lake, rolling its dark sulphurous waves in the light of the summer moon. Ho ! ho ! what a tomb for the skull of the Wolf !

“The Guelfi were landless outcasts, until, by the treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, Naples passed away from Spanish domination ; and, under Charles of Parma, my father recovered the old possessions of our house ; now, in imitation of Amadeo, I am ready for revolt ; and, with every chance of success, to-morrow shall unroll the banner of Joseph of Naples, whom Madonna bless ! To-morrow, let the Alfieri and loyalists beware : I will not spare even the innkeeper in the cage, or the dog that sleeps on the hearth. Drink, Scarolla, to the Signora Bianca, who by to-morrow eve will be hailed as the gay capitanessa !”

But Scarolla heard him not : his head had fallen forward on his breast, and long ere the host’s story was concluded, he was snoring with the force of a trombone.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HAPPINESS.

By daybreak next morning we were clear of the castello; for we quitted its walls while its ruffian inmates were buried in slumber. I was happy when the ladies were mounted, and once more on the road, having been under considerable apprehension for their safety; dreading, perhaps, our detention as royalist prisoners in the barone's residence.

"A rough night the last for a march, signor," said I to Captain Gismondo, whom we found parading the Calabrian street of Amato.

"A tempest, signor! the blue glare of the lightning alone revealed to us that foaming river which we forded, the water rising to our waist-belts; and the rain that rushed down from heaven was every drop large enough to beat in our drum-heads."

Ordering the company to march by a solitary and long-forgotten road towards St. Eufemio, I informed Gismondo and my fair charge of the diabolical plan laid by the barone and his revolvers to destroy the villa, and assign the innocent Bianca to the wretch Scarolla, as the price of his co-operation. Her sisters shrieked with terror, and old Battista gave me a stern smile while laying his hand on his sword.

"I know a path across the mountains, signor;" I travelled it once to Monteleone: my little daughter was with me then;" he sighed deeply. "By Ave Maria this evening, our good friends the Alfieri will have a hundred and fifty bayonets at their disposal. Compagna, three right, quick march," and we moved off with rapidity.

Marching by the most retired roads, we made a circuit among the mountains, to deceive the barone, if any of his scouts should have followed us. The evening sun was casting the long shadows of the lofty hills of Nicastro across the woods and valleys of St. Eufemio, the waters of the bay were rolling in their usual varied tints of sparkling blue, and the eve was so calm and still, that the dash of the lonely breakers, as they flowed on the sandy beach, was heard ~~man~~ miles from the shore, mingling

with the solemn hymn of the Sicilian mariners, and the crews of those picturesque feluccas which spread their striped latteen sails to the breezes of the strait.

Leaving Gismondo with his company to follow, I pushed on with the ladies at full gallop towards the villa; they were both expert horsewomen, and quite outstripped me, as we flew along the sandy marino. Their merry laughter and taunting cries of "Fi! fi! signor capitano," were very galling to me, for I was considered the best horseman (except Lascelles) on the Sicilian staff, and had twice won the regimental and brigade cup at the Palermitan races.

"On my honour! ladies, if I held the reins of my brave English grey, instead of those of a chubby Calabrian horse, you would not have distanced me thus," said I, when they halted to let me come up with them.

The battery erected by the soldiers of Sir Louis de Watteville was now abandoned and demolished; the cannon were away, and the platforms overgrown with luxuriant grass. How stirringly my time had passed since the morning when our army landed on the beach close by!

The moment we rode into the quadrangle of the villa, the clattering hoofs roused the whole household, as the blast of a trumpet would have done. To be brief,—great was the joy diffused by our arrival. We disturbed the old viscontessa from cards, with which she was rapidly gaining from old Adriano all the ducats she had paid at confessional an hour before, for peccadilloes. The young visconte, pale, and worn with long illness of mind and body, received the trembling Francesca to his arms as if she had been restored to him from the tomb. The Italians are peculiarly excitable, and his transports were wild in the extreme. He had expected to behold his bride no more, and now she was hanging on his bosom, free, happy, and more beautiful than ever. As I had long foreseen, he placed in my hand that of his blushing cousin, Bianca, while the venerable viscontessa wept and prayed with joy, scattered a handful of cards and counters over us, in her confusion, and embraced us by turns. The whole household, male and female, from Andronicus the chasseur, to the little ragazzo who turned the spits, joined in a general chorus of joy; they commenced the furious tarantella in

the quadrangle, and the whole mansion rang with shouts, which were soon to be changed for those of a less agreeable nature.

Around the white neck of Bianca, I threw the riband with the gold medal, presented to me by Cardinal York, whose kindness had restored Francesca to light and life, and the sweet girl kissed it, promising to treasure it, for his sake and mine. She appeared so beautiful, so blooming, and happy, as she hung upon my shoulder, in the recess of a lofty window, with the light of the western sky streaming on her bright curls and glittering dress, and Santugo seemed so much absorbed in the presence of her sister, who was seated between him and his mother, with a hand clasped fondly by each, that I was loath to disturb the happy group, and blight their general joy, by speaking of Guelfo; but the appearance of Gismondo's company marching along the marino, and the advanced hour of the evening, made it imperative that arrangements should be made for fighting or flying. All changed colour when I mentioned Castelguelfo: Santugo's brow grew black, and his mother burst into tears.

"O, Luigi! to remain would be madness, when Giacomo and all our people are serving as soldiers at Reggio!" she exclaimed.

"It ill beseems you, signora, to counsel me to my dishonour," replied the fierce young man, with singular hauteur, while his lip quivered, and his dark eyes shone with fire. "Like all the family of Amato, Dionisio is a coward at heart, and a rebel Buonapartist; and shall I, who am esteemed among the bravest and most patriotic of our noblesse, fly before a base leaguer with banditti? Never! With Gismondo's Calabri, and the armed men I can collect on an hour's notice, to the last will I defend my father-house, fighting from chamber to chamber, and story to story, and die, rather than yield, even should Guelfo involve the whole fabric in flames and destruction."

"Ammirando!" exclaimed Gismondo, entering, "you speak as I expected to hear the son of my old comrade, whose honours you will never tarnish. Courage, ladies! One hundred and fifty bayonets are here, under my orders; and, with Madonna's blessing, and our own hands, the Wolf may fall into as great a snare as old Amadeo did in the days of poor Campanella."

The viscontessa shuddered, but her son took down his sword from the wall.

"Dundas," said he, "to you, who are a soldier of greater experience than any here (not even excepting our old guerilla, Gimmondo), I look principally for advice during this night's uproar. Come, signor, leave Bianca, and loosen your sabre in its sheath. Ladies, away to your mandolins and embroidery, or to ave and credo; your presence alone unmans me. Olà, Zaccheo! where the devil is my old courier tarrying now? Bolt and barricade every door and window, and muster and arm the valets. Even the little ragazzo must handle a musket to-night."

"Had we not better send a horseman to the Royal Reggitore of Nicastro, for aid?"

"An insolent Sicilian dog!" replied Santugo. "No, no; we must trust to Heaven and our own bravery."

Land and ocean had grown dark, or what is deemed so in fair Ansonia. The bright stars studding the whole firmament, and the pale silver moon rising over the dark green ridges of the wooded hills, shed their mystic light on cape and bay over Amato's frowning rocks and flowing river, illuminating the tall round tower, the broad façade, and many arcades of the Villa d'Alfieri, and bathing in silver the orange-woods around it.

Before the hour of the projected attack, we had all prepared for defence, and our arrangements had been made for a vigorous one: every door, window, and aperture, were strongly barred and barricaded; piles of furniture, statues, cushions, ottomans, massive tomes from the library, and everything suitable, were pressed into the service,—forming barriers in the passages and on stair-landings, in case of an assault. Ere midnight tolled from the sonorous old clock in the quadrangle, all the ladies and their attendants were stowed away in the attic-story, and one hundred and eighty men were stationed at the different posts assigned them below. Gismondo commanded one wing of the mansion; his lieutenant and Alfiero, two cavaliers of the house of Bisignano, the other; while Santugo and myself occupied the centre.

The soldiers were so well posted, that the different approaches to the villa were completely enfiladed, while that by the quadrangle would be exposed to a deadly cross-fire from fifty windows. In this order, we awaited the revolt.

On making my rounds, to see that all were on the alert, I visited the ladies, who, in the attic story of the old round tower, were quite secure from musketry. The old viscontessa was on her knees, praying; she had relinquished her cards for "The Litanies of our Blessed Lady," and a crowd of female domestics knelt around her. Bianca and her sisters were clustered together, with arms entwined, like three beautiful graces, but looking pale and terrified, awaiting the strife with beating hearts and eyes suffused with tears.

"Dearest Claude!" said she whose gentle voice I loved best, "for God's sake! O, for my sake! do not expose yourself heedlessly to danger."

"Courage, dear one," said I, putting an arm playfully round her, "we must all fight like the Trojans of old. Think of what will be the fate of us all,—of yourself, in particular,—if Guelfo and his ruffian compeers capture the villa to-night. If I can put a bullet into the head of this new suitor, Scarolla—Tush, Bianca! ridiculous,—is it not?" She made a sickly attempt to smile, but bowed her head on my shoulder, and wept. I heard Santugo and his chasseur uttering my name, and calling aloud through various parts of the mansion, but I was too agreeably occupied to attend to them just then.

"Allerta!" cried Gismondo; and, knowing the military warning, I hurried away to the scene of action.

"See you the rascals, signor?" said he, pointing from a barricaded window to a dark mass moving along the distant roadway, and rapidly debouching into the lawn. They marched in the full glare of the moonlight, and the gleam of steel flashed incessantly from the shapeless column. They carried two standards, and one was a tri-colour.

"Some of those Jacobin dogs are the iron-miners of Stilo: they have long been stubborn traitors," said Santugo, in accents of rage.

"And bold Scarolla, so long the scourge of Frenchmen, why leagues he with villains such as these?"

"You forgot, signor," replied the young lord, with a grim smile, "that he is either to gain a noble bride, or an ounce-bullet to-night."

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLA BESIEGED.

"**TROMBADORE, sound the alert!**" cried I, to the little Calabrian trumpeter. The sharp blast of his brass instrument awoke every echo of the great villa; there was a clatter of accoutrements, a clashing of bayonets and buckles, a hum, and all became still as the grave. We now heard the tread of the advancing force, which divided into two bodies,—one to assault the house in front, the other in flank. A red light shot up between the trees of the avenue, as an earnest of what was to ensue: the gate-lodge had been given to the flames.

A steep sloping terrace, enclosed by a high balustrade, encircled the whole villa: six iron wickets, leading to the lawn and garden, had been well secured, and this outer defence formed our first barrier against the foe, who advanced within a few yards of it, before I ordered the trumpeter to sound again. At the first note, a volley, which the assailants little expected, was poured upon them, throwing them into the utmost confusion, and driving them back with slaughter. They replied with promptitude, and poor old Gismondo fell dead by my side. My blood now got heated in earnest.

"**Bravissimo soldateria!**" I cried, to the Free Calabri, while brandishing my sabre, and hurrying from post to post, to animate their resistance: "level low, and fire where they are thickest." The roar of the musketry stirred all the echoes of the vast, resounding building: its long corridors, lofty saloons, and domed ceilings, gave back the reports with redoubled force; every place was filled with smoke, without and within: every window and aperture was streaked with fire, bristling with bright steel bayonets, and swarming with dark, fierce visages.

Our fire made frightful havoc among the revolted, who numbered above a thousand, all keen for plunder, infuriated by unexpected opposition, and maddened by wine, drunk in the various houses and cellars they had pillaged on their march: their yells were like those of wild beasts or savages.

The *shirri*, or feudal *gens-d'armes*, who wore the barone's livery, were lost among the dense rabble of barefooted

miners from Stilo, grim charcoal-burners, and Scarolla's squalid banditti. A revolting array of hideous faces, I beheld moving beneath me in the moonlight, distorted by every malignant and evil passion, and flushed with wine, fury, and inborn ferocity. In the blaze of their brandished torches, glittered weapons of every description, from the pike twelve feet long, to the short spadetto and knife of Bastia. Onward they rushed, a mighty mass of ferocity and filth; and again they were repulsed, leaving the quadrangle strewn with killed and wounded.

"Viva Giuseppe! superba!" cried a shrill, quavering voice: it was that of the barone, whom we now saw heading a third attack in person, whilst a strong party, making a lodgment under the portico, assailed the grand entrance with crowbars and levers. The colonnade protected them from our fire, and the massy framework of the door was fast yielding to the blows of pickaxes and hammers, with which the strong-armed miners assailed it, whilst their courage increased as the barrier gradually gave way before their strenuous efforts. At last, a tremendous shout announced that an aperture was made; upon which, I ordered the barricades of the vestibule to be strengthened, and lined by a double rank of soldiers, intrusting their command to the young Alfiero Caraffa.

The fire of the besiegers had now reduced our force to about eighty effective men; and my anxiety for the safety of the villa and its inmates increased with the wounds and deaths around me. The whole terrace on the land-side was lined with marksmen, who knelt behind the stone balusters, and fired between them with deadly precision at the large upper windows; through which the white uniforms and gay trappings of the Royal Calabrians were distinctly visible in the moonlight. I dreaded the continuation of this deadly fire more than a close assault; and, to increase my anxiety, Andronicus, who acted as our commissary, came with a most lugubrious visage to inform me that the ammunition was becoming expended, and that the pouches of the Free Calabri were almost empty.

"God! we are lost, then!" I exclaimed; this information fell upon me like a thunderbolt. I hurried to Santugo, whom I found kneeling, rifle in hand, before a narrow loophole, endeavouring to discover the little barone, the

main-spring of this revolt, whom it was no easy task to perceive, among such a rabble, although we heard his croaking voice and chuckling laugh every moment.

"Superba! viva Giuseppe Buonaparté! viva la Capitanezza Scarolla!" The banditti answered by a yell of delight. "On, on, brave rogues;" he added, "we will have two pieces of cannon here in an hour."

"Cannon!" I reiterated, and exchanged glances with Santugo. We were both astounded by the intelligence.

"O, Claude!" said my friend, "I tremble only for my mother, for Francesca, and her sisters. For myself, per Baccho! you know I would fight, without a tremor, till roof and rafters, column and cupola, fell in ruins above me. Is all lost, then?"

"No," said I, speaking through my hand; for the noise of the conflict was deafening; "we may save the villa yet, and all its inmates; but a bold dash must be made. Look yonder! what see you?"

"I understand—the task is mine."

"*Mine*, rather."

"No, no, Signor Claude, I have Francesca at stake."

"And I, Bianca—we are equal."

"I care not. Olà, Andronicus! saddle my cavallo Barbero, and look well to girth and holster—quick, away, Signor Greco!"

"What we saw was the British fleet, consisting of a gigantic ship of the line and three or four frigates and corvettes, standing slowly down the straits of the Pharo, and keeping close in shore, attracted, probably, by the sound of the firing. I knew the flag-ship of Sir Sidney Smith, by its old-fashioned poop-lantern; and my project was to despatch a messenger on board, craving help. But how could one leave the villa? it was environed on one side by surf and steep rocks, shelving down to a whirlpool; on the other, by fierce assailants, who were merciless as the yawning sea.

Desperate was the venture; but that it must be attempted, we knew was imperative. A friendly contest ensued between us and the two Cavalieri Caraffa, each insisting on being the executor of the dangerous service. We contested the point so long, that it was at last referred to a throw of dice: the lot fell on Luigi, who prepared at once for the deadly mission, by divesting himself of his

mantle, buttoning his short velvet surtout closely about him, and taking in three holes of his sword-belt; while I hurriedly indited the following note to the admiral.

" Villa d'Alfieri, Sept. 20th, 1808.

" SIR,—I have the honour to request that you will order as strong a detachment of seamen or marines as you may deem necessary, to be landed at the villa of the Alfieri, which is closely besieged by the baron of Castelguelfo, a Buonapartist, who is now at the head of a numerous force of Italian rebels. To protect the loyal family of the bearer, the visconte di Santugo, I placed in the villa a company of the Free Corps, and have already to regret the loss of Captain Battista Gismondo, and nearly sixty rank and file. Our case is desperate. The villa will not be tenable one hour longer, as the barone (whom Regnier has supplied with all munition of war) is bringing two pieces of cannon against it, and our cartridges are totally expended.

" I have the honour, &c. &c.

" CLAUDE DUNDAS, Capt. 62nd regt."

" Admiral Sir SIDNEY SMITH,

" H.M. ship *Pompey*."

According to the fashion of many large Italian houses, the stables formed a part of the principal building; and so, in the present emergency, it was lucky that the horses were at hand. Santugo's black Barbary horse, with its red, quivering nostrils, eyes sparkling fire, and its mane bristling at the noise of the musketry, was led by the Greek chasseur through a long corridor to a saloon which overlooked the grottos by the sea-shore. The saddled steed was an unusual visitor in that noble apartment, where statues, vases, pictures, and sofas, were piled up in confusion, to form barricades before six tall windows which faced the straits. One was open, revealing the bright sky, the sparkling sea, Sicilia's coast, and the sailing fleet, while ten Calabri, with their bayonets at the charge, stood by, to guard the aperture.

The brave young noble mounted, and, stooping as he passed out, guided his horse along a ledge of slippery rock, and the casement was immediately secured behind him. We watched him with equal anxiety and admiration, as he rode along the perilous path, where one false

step of the Barbary would have plunged him in the whirlpool, which roared and sucked in the foaming eddies, beneath the villa walls. The instant he passed the angle of the building, which was swept by the fire of the assailants, there burst from them a simultaneous yell, which was answered by a shout of reckless defiance from the daring Santugo, who, driving spurs into his fleet horse, compelled it to clear the high balustraded terrace by a flying leap. Then his long sword flashed in the moonlight as he slashed right and left, crying—"Viva Carolina! Ferdinando nostro e la Santa Fede!" cutting his way through the yelling mass, escaping bullet and steel as if he had a charmed life; he passed through them and was free, and I had no doubt would gain the village (where the boats lay) safely and rapidly.

Enraged at his escape, the revolvers pressed on with renewed fury, but changed their mode of attack. A cloud now passed over the moon, involving the scenery in comparative darkness; but it was soon to be illuminated in a manner I little expected.

There flashed forth a sudden glare of light, revealing the sea of ferocious visages and glancing arms of the enemy, the bloody terrace heaped with dead, the dark arcades, carved cornices, and lofty portico of the villa: a lurid glare shone over everything, and a man advanced to the terrace holding aloft an Indian sky-rocket, a terrible species of firework, often used by the French. Its yellow blaze fell full upon the face of the bearer, in whom I recognized the villanous engineer, Navarro; I snatched a musket from the hand of a dead soldier, but ere it was aimed, the traitor had shot the fiery missile from his hand and disappeared.

This terrible instrument of eastern warfare forced itself forward, roaring and blazing towards the villa, and, breaking through a window, plunged about as if instinct with life, setting fire to everything inflammatory within its reach. From its size and weight, and the formation of its sides, which were bristling with spikes, it finally stuck fast to the flooring of a room, where its power of combustion increased every instant, and a succession of reports burst from it as its fire-balls flew off in every direction. All fled in dismay, to avoid being blown up by the sparks falling into their pouches, scorched to death by remaining in its vicinity, shot by its bullets, or stabbed by

the spikes, which it shot forth incessantly, like quills from a "fretful porcupine."

In vain I cried for water; no one heard me; the diabolical engine bounded, roared, and hissed like a very devil, involving us in noisome and suffocating smoke; and in three minutes the magnificent villa was in flames, and its defenders paralyzed.

"Superba!" cried the barone. "Viva Giuseppe!" and the triumphant yells of his enraged followers redoubled. I turned to the Cavalieri Caraffa.

"Gentlemen, keep your soldiers at their posts to the last," said I, "while I provide for the retreat of the ladies."

"How, signor!" asked Andronicus; "on every hand they environ us, save the seaward, where a whirlpool—O, omnipotente!"

At that moment, we heard the report of a cannon; a round shot passed through the great door, demolishing in its passage a beautiful fountain of marble and bronze, and the water flowed in a torrent over the tessellated pavement, while musketry was discharged in quick succession through the breach. To augment our distress, the barone's guns had come up; and the triumphant cries, the ferocity and daring of the assailants, increased as the hot flames grew apace around us. Shrieks now burst from the summit of the round tower: overwhelmed with anxiety and rage, and faint with the heat and smoke of the fire-arms and conflagration, I hurried up the great staircase to bring away the females, who could not remain five minutes longer: but where or how I was to convey them, Heaven only knew!

The moon, which had been obscured for some time, now shone forth with renewed lustre, and I saw the sea brightening like a silver flood, as the last clouds passed away from the shining orb. O, sight of joy! Three large boats filled with marines and seamen were at that moment pulled close under the rocks, to which they had advanced unseen by the foe. The headmost had already disappeared in the sea grottos: and I heard the measured clank of the rowlocks, and saw the oar-blades of the sternmost barge flash like blue fire, as they were feathered in true man-o'-war style. The boats shot under the rocks, like arrows; one moment the glittering moon poured its cold light on the gilded caps and bristling bayonets

of the closely-packed marines—on the bright pike-heads, the gleaming cutlasses, and little tarpaulins of the seamen—and the next, it shone on the lonely, seething ocean.

"Saved, thank heaven!" I exclaimed, rushing down the stair. "Bravo, soldateria! fight on, brave Calabri, for aid is near. Hollo, Zaccheo! throw open the windows to the back, and bring down the ladies, before the fire reaches the upper stories. Hollo, signor trombadore! sound the *rally*, my brave little man!"

The poor boy was so terrified, that his trumpet-call was only a feeble squeak; but the survivors of the company, about fifty in number, rushed from all quarters to the spot. A volley of musketry announced that our marines had opened on the assailants.

"Let us sally out—away with the barricades!" cried Lieutenant Caraffa, and we rushed forth with charged bayonets, eager to revenge the slaughter and devastation of the night. The regular fire of a hundred marines from the terrace—to which Santugo led them by a secret passage from the grotto below—threw the revoltors into a panic, and their discomfiture was completed by a strong detachment of seamen, headed by Hanfield, the gallant captain of the *Delight*, whom Sir Sidney had sent in command of the expedition. Rushing over the lawn with a wild hurrah, they fell slashing and thrusting with cutlass and pike among the recoiling rabble of the barone, who, abandoning their two six-pounder guns, fled *en masse*, with rapidity; but fighting every step of the way towards the mountains, and firing on us from behind every bush and rock which afforded momentary concealment. In the pursuit, I encountered the formidable Scarolla, who fired both his pistols at me without effect, as I rushed upon him with my sabre; clubbing his rifle, he swung it round his head with a force sufficiently formidable, but, watching an opportunity when he overstruck himself, I sabred him above the left eye, and beat him to the ground, when some of his followers made a rally and carried him off.

"Viva Giuseppe!" cried a well-known voice close by me, and looking round, I beheld the little author of all the mischief struggling in the grasp of a seaman, whom, by his embroidered anchors, I recognized as boatswain of the *Delight*. He was not much taller than his antagonist,

the barone, but strong and thickset, with the chest and shoulders of an ox ; an ample sunburnt visage, surmounted by a little glazed hat, and fringed by a circular beard of black wiry hair below, his cheek distended by a quid, and an enormous pig-tail reaching below his waist-belt, made him seem a very formidable antagonist to Guelfo, whom he had knocked down, and over whom he was flourishing his heavy cutlass, squirting a little tobacco-juice into his eyes from time to time.

"*Maladetto!*" growled the Italian lord, "*O, povero voi, Signor Marinero!*"

"*Avast, old Gingerbread! I speak none of your foreign lingos,*" replied the boatswain.

Flushed with rage and disappointment, the barone struggled furiously with his strong antagonist, who held him at arm's length, in doubt whether to cleave him down or let him go, till Zaccheo, the Greek, approached, and, ere I could interfere, ended the matter, by driving his *routeau-de-chasse* through the heart of Guelfo, who expired without a groan.

By daybreak, the fighting was over. A poor little midshipman and several seamen were killed ; a hundred of our mad assailants lay dead in the quadrangle, and as many more round the terrace. In the villa, half its garrison lay killed or wounded around the windows, from which the flames and smoke rolled forth in mighty volumes ; many were roasted or consumed before we could remove them ; poor old Gismondo with the rest. Hanfield ordered his men to save the villa from further destruction ; but the flames had gathered such force, that for a time every effort seemed fruitless. Assisted by three boats' crews from the flag-ship, they pulled down a part of the mansion, and turned the water of the *jets d'eau* on the rest, to prevent the fire (which was confined to one wing), from spreading to the main building. After an hour of toil and danger, during which I worked away in my shirt-sleeves until I was as black as a charcoal-burner, the flames were suppressed ; but how changed was the aspect of the once splendid villa !

One portion of the building was roofless and ruined ; its lofty casements shattered, its corbelled balconies, tall pillars, and rich Corinthian entablatures, scorched by fire, and blackened by smoke ; the ravaged gardens and ter-

aces were strewn with corpses, the halls, saloons, and corridors, encumbered with the same ghastly objects, splashed with blood, and filled with confusion and destruction ; pier-glasses, vases, and statues were dashed to pieces ; hangings and pictures rent and torn. The quiet library and elegant boudoir rang with the cries of the wounded, or the reckless merriment of the sailors, who caroused on the richest wines. But Santugo looked around him with the most perfect *sang froid*.

Twenty prisoners we had captured were sent over to Palermo, where they expiated their revolt in the horrible dungeons of the Damusi,—the most frightful, perhaps, in the world, where their bones are probably lying at this hour.

CHAPTER LI.

THE NUPTIALS.

WHEN the fight was over, the fire extinguished, and the dead all interred, I repaired to the grotto, where the ladies and their attendants were shivering with terror, and the cold air of the sea, which every instant threw a shower of sparkling spray into the damp vaults. A statue to St. Hugh, before which three dim tapers were always burning, gave a picturesque aspect to the natural grotto, and a rill of limpid water, at which the saint had quenched his thirst, gurgled from the rocks into a rich font of white marble. Around this little shrine the females were clustered ; and a cry burst from them when I approached in my unseemly garb, spotted with blood, blackened by powder, smoke, and toil, and plastered over with clay, as if I had been dipped in the mud-baths of Abano.

The carriage was brought ; the horses of the ladies were saddled, and they left the half-ruined villa with a strong escort, to take up a temporary residence at the castle of Angistola, the property of the duke of Bagnara, near Pizzo. After seeing the remains of the Calabrian company embarked for Messina in our gun-boats, I, accompanied by Santugo, followed the ladies at full gallop leaving the old chasseur to act as commandant at the villa. I despatched a mounted servant to Scylla, for some of my baggage, a suit of uniform especially, as my harness was quite ridiculous in the gay *salons* of the duchess.

At Angistola, the ladies soon recovered from their terror and fatigue; the beauty of the scenery, where the steep Apennines sloped down to the gulf of St. Eufemio, covered with dark pines or orange-trees, and the deep-wooded dell through which the river wound, seemed gloomy, solemn, and picturesque. The duke of Bagnara held a military command at a distance, but his fair *duchessa*, who was one of the reigning beauties of the Sicilian court, received us with every honour and kindness.

A few days after our arrival, we had the castello filled with milliners from Palermo, and the ladies were constantly clustered in deep consultation around the duchess, in her boudoir; the visconte was joyous and gay—a *fête* was evidently approaching; he was about to espouse his cousin, with all the splendour that wealth could yield, and the imposing pomp of the Catholic Church impart: and (to be brief) I found myself on the same happy footing with my dear little Bianca, without the portentous question having been asked. It was all quite understood; we had made no secret of our mutual attachment, which was revealed by every gentle word and tender glance. Our marriage was the earnest wish of Santugo and the viscontessa; and as for her principal relative, the withered little prince of St. Agata, as the girl was without a ducat, he cared not a straw who became her husband.

The day before the auspicious one, old Frà Adriano came jogging up to the castello, on his ambling mule, in the execution of his office as family confessor, to confess us all, according to the Italian custom, before marriage. To this I objected, first with a joke, and then gravely, much to the horror of the reverend friar; he turned up his eyes, and muttering, “Ahi! eretico!” went in search of Bianca, who confessed to him—heaven knows what! So innocent a being could have nothing to reveal, save her own happiness and joy.

Adriano had scarcely left me, when I saw a serjeant, in the welcome and well-known uniform of my own regiment, ascending the steep avenue to the castle porch.

“What can be the matter now?” thought I, and at such a time—the deuce! “Well, Gask, what news from the corps, and what has brought you here?” said I, as he entered the room, and stood straight as his half-pike, which he held advanced. “Take a chair, man,” I added, with that kind familiarity with which an officer ought

always to greet a soldier of his own regiment in a strange place.

"Sir, I have brought a letter from Sir John Stuart. Being on my way to join the garrison at Scylla castle, he sent me over in a gun-boat from Messina, that I might deliver this, which he was anxious you should receive without delay."

I tore open the note. It ran thus :—

"Messina, Tuesday Morning.

"DEAR DUNDAS,—Join your garrison at Scylla, without a moment's delay ; General Sherbrooke threatens to supersede you, and order you to join the 'Wiltshire,' at Syracuse, as he understands that you attend more to the ladies than his majesty's service. Massena and Regnier are concentrating forces in Upper Calabria ; the chiefs of the Masse are wavering, and you may expect more broken heads by Christmas. Adieu ! I start for London to-morrow.

"I am, &c. &c.,

"J. STUART, Major-General."

"So, Gask, you are bound for Scylla ?" said I, glad the note contained only a friendly hint.

"Yes, sir."

"You will go with me, as it is unsafe for you to travel alone in such a country as this. I set out the day after to-morrow."

"I am much obliged to you, sir, for your forethought. Do we march by daybreak ?"

"No, no," I answered, laughing ; "that would scarcely suit ; but retire with the chamberlain, who will order you a luncheon, and tell you news."

Though pleased with Sir John's friendly attention, I could very well have dispensed with the presence of my countryman, the serjeant, who was a true-blue Presbyterian from the Howe of Fife, an ardent worshipper of Eben Erskine, and one, consequently, who would look with pious horror on the popish ceremonies of the morrow, which there was no doubt he would witness, with the household of the castello.

Poor Gask ! He was a worthy and good soldier, for whom the whole corps had a sincere respect. Educated for our stern Scottish kirk, some misfortunes in early life forced him into the ranks, where his superior attain-

ments and classical education made him a marvel among the Wiltshire men, and gained him three stripes, although it could do nothing more, the quiet tenor of his way being the reverse of the smart drill corporal or bustling serjeant-major, who looks forward to the post of adjutant. He was the beau-ideal of a Scottish soldier—grave, intelligent, and steady; and was seldom seen, unless book in hand, reading in some retired nook, when his comrades were roystering in the canteen or sutler's tent. Poor Gask! this page is the only tribute to your memory.

Next day, the marriages were celebrated with great pomp in the church of St. Eufemio, at Nicastro; that of the visconte and Francesca took place first, and was followed by that of Bianca and myself. A new uniform coat was quite spoiled by the holy water, which the bishop sprinkled over us very liberally; and my white "regimental breeches" were totally ruined by the rough mosaic of the church, when I advanced on my knees, with a lighted candle in one hand, to present bread and wine to the bishop, while old Adrian waved the stole over us, according to the usage of the land.

"Ah! if any of our mess could see me just now, how the rogues would laugh," thought I, while scrambling along the aisle, with the hot wax dropping on my fingers from the confounded taper, which I did not hold so gracefully as Bianca held hers. Grand as the ceremony was, I disliked so much of it, and dreaded to encounter the cold smile and smirking face of Serjeant Gask, who stood, upright as a pike, among the kneeling domestics.

We were glad when the bishop concluded the ritual, the fundamental part of which was simple enough; but I could very well have dispensed with all that Italian superstition had added to it; yet I behaved with such decorum, that the bishop believed me as stanch a Catholic as ever kissed cross, and fain would gentle Bianca have thought me so too. The moment we left the altar, a bright circle of young ladies clustered round her, covering her with kisses, while the people shouted, "O giorno felice! Viva il capitano! Viva la capitanezza!"

All blessed her, and muttered, "Bell' Idolo!" as she passed forth; indeed, she appeared as enchanting as beauty of the most delicate caste, the richest attire, and most splendid diamonds could make her, and if always lovely, even in the plainest garb, imagine how she must have

shone in her magnificent bridal dress, when her eyes beamed with delight, and her soft cheek turned alternately deep red and deadly pale, as the blood came and went with the varying thoughts that agitated her—awe and modesty, love and exultation.

“Giorno felice, indeed!” thought I, and, springing into the carriage beside her, we drove off for the castello, as fast as four galloping horses could take us. The sonorous organ, the chanting priests, the ringing bells, the shouts, and discharge of fire-arms, died away behind us, and accompanied by a gay cavalcade of the fairest and noblest in the province, our marriage train swept through the solitary vale of the Angistola, at full speed, towards the castle, where a lordly *fête* awaited us, and from the tall windows of its hall a blaze of light was shed on the darkening scenery and winding river as we rode up the gloomy avenue.

CHAPTER LII.

THE TEMPEST.—THE LAST OF THE HUNCHBACK.

LEAVING Santugo and his bride with the duchess, we set out next day for Scylla: our calesso having an escort, without which, it was impossible to travel in such a country. Gask occupied the rumble, beside Annina, while a chasseur, with ten sbirri, sent by the duchess, rode five in front and five in the rear; their leader riding some hundred yards in advance. All these men wore the duke's livery; they were well mounted, and armed with carbines sabres, and pistols. The calesso was furnished with a loop-hole, opening under the rumble, through which I could blaze away with my pistols, in case of having to retreat skirmishing.

The scenery was now beginning to assume the brown warm tints of autumn, but the savage mountain gorges, the deep woods, the winding shore, and beetling cliffs, through which the road lay, were not less beautiful than when I passed them before with poor Castelermo. The ramparts of Monteleone, the bosky forest of Burello, the silver windings of Metramo, the famous vineyards of Rossarno and Gioja were all passed rapidly; and, plunging

down into the wilderness, between the Apennines and the sea, we had accomplished half our journey, when a tremendous storm overtook us.

Our hearts were so full of happiness, and each was so much absorbed in the presence of the other, that we marked not the flight of time; and though our carriage rolled on through the most beautiful scenery of that wild province, we bestowed scarce a glance or a thought upon it. Yet we conversed very little, for an overwhelming sense of happiness had quite subdued Bianca's vivacity.

I deemed myself the luckiest member of our Calabrian army. Hundreds had come only to find a tomb on the plains of Maida, before the ramparts of Crotona, or in the trenches of Scylla. A few had gained a step of promotion and a little honour; the general a great deal—the title of count; and, from the city of London, a substantial dinner at the Mansion-house, with the present of a splendid sword; but I had gained Bianca d'Alfieri, who had, last season, turned half the heads in Palermo. "Bravo Claude!" thought I; "it is quite a regimental triumph, and deserves to be borne on our colours. At Syracuse, the mess will drink deep when they hear of it."

The darkening of the sky, across the azure surface of which dense columns of cloud were moving in rapid succession, and the exhalation of a chilly vapour and malaria from the stagnant pools of a dismal swamp, in which we suddenly became entangled, all foreboded a coming storm. The sea, when seen at intervals between the opening hills, was black as ink, and fleckered with masses of foam. Vessels were making all snug aloft, and getting close under the lee of the shore, to avoid the threatened tempest, which was soon to sweep over the bosom of the trackless ocean. The rumbling of the carriage and the hoofs of our galloping escort sounded deep and hollow between the echoing hills.

"Signor," said their decurione or chasseur, riding up to the window, which I had let down for the admission of air, "in three minutes we shall have a tremendous storm, —perhaps la capitanessa would wish to seek a place of safety."

"But where?"

"Madonna only knows, excellency. The earth shakes, the air is thick. I am an old man, and remember with dread when last I saw such signs. Fly to the shore—the

sea may engulf you ; to the hills—they may fall down, and overwhelm you ; to the plains—and the solid earth may yawn beneath your feet.”

“ Pleasant !” I said, considerably startled ; “ what do you advise—to seek Seminara ? The spire of the Greek cathedral rises yonder, above the pine-woods and vapour of the marshes.”

“ No, signor, we are safer on the mountains or in the marshes : here let us remain, and trust to Madonna for protection.”

“ In God alone is all my trust !” said the Scottish serjeant, whose knowledge of Latin enabled him to understand the *sbirro* ; but as for your Madonna——” he snapped his fingers, without concluding.

The blackness was increasing fast, and we sought the shelter offered by a thick pine-wood to escape the pelting rain, which rushed down in a torrent, every drop larger than a pistol-bullet. As it would have been unsoldier-like to remain in the calesso while our escort were exposed to the storm, I passed the time under the trees, rolled up in my military cloak, after securing the carriage-doors, to protect Bianca and her attendant, who drew their veils close, to shut out the flashes of vivid lightning which every instant illumined the darkest dingles of the forest. A terrible noise, such as I had never heard before, rumbled in the earth and air. I looked to the *sbirro* ; he was crossing himself and muttering an *ave*, while a sour Presbyterian smile curled the lips of Gask, who leaned on his pike beside him. The *chasseur*, or *decurione*, ordered the horses to be unharnessed from the carriage, and I had soon reason to thank him sincerely for his forethought.

We saw the flames of distant Etna casting a light across the western sky, but, in every other direction, the heavens were involved in gloom, or dark grey twilight. The whole atmosphere, however, soon began to assume an aspect so fiery, that over Seminara the dense clouds seemed as if rolling in flames, and we beheld the tall façade of the Greek abbey, the dark mountains, and the arches of a ruined aqueduct between them, standing in bold outline and strong relief on the red and luminous background. The scene was wild and magnificent ; but the drenching rain, and the roaring wind, which shook the strongest pines like ostrich feathers, and almost blew us away with the branches, leaves, and stones, which it swept over the

waste, the sulphureous state of the atmosphere, and the ground trembling beneath our feet, made us feel, altogether, too uncomfortable to enjoy the splendid aspect of the heavens and earth agitated by such a storm.

It was truly Calabrian! Our horses snorted and pranced, their manes bristled, their prominent eyes shot fire, and it required all our efforts to calm them, and keep them from breaking the bridle-reins, which we had buckled to trees. Suddenly, a most appalling clap of thunder burst over our heads, like the broadside of a fleet. A lofty and precipitous cliff of volcanic rock, which reared up its rugged front not far from us, heaved and reeled, like some mighty animal convulsed with agony: shaken to the base by some tremendous subterranean throe, it rocked visibly, and the foliage on its summit was tossed, like raven plumage on a hearse, by the motion.

Anon, a cry of dismay burst from the sbirri. An enormous mass became detached from the highest peak; rolling from its perpendicular front, and rebounding from cliff to cliff, it came thundering into the plain below, bringing with it a mighty ruin of shattered stones, dust, trees, and soil, which fell like the fragments of a mountain, and with a force that shook the ground we stood on. The crash was deafening: a storm of leaves, small stones, and dust flew past us, and, for a minute, the air was fearfully dense, gloomy, and palpable. I reeled, and clung to the carriage-wheels for support; Bianca swooned; Gask was praying devoutly, with his grenadier-cap off, and the sbirri muttered their aves aloud: above us, the thunder rolled on from peak to peak, and the lightning shot between them, while the air grew darker and more sulphureous.

Terrified by the shaken rock and the bursting thunderbolts, our fiery horses became mad: they foamed, snorted, plunged, and kicked fire from the stones; the four that were unharnessed from the calesso, broke loose, and fled, at full speed, towards Seminara, pursued by the decurione and his sbirri, who were eager to save them: they were noble bays, and favourites of the duchess. Thus the serjeant and I were left alone, standing by the calesso.

"Ghieu, ho! ho!" cried a croaking voice in the thicket. I heard a chuckling laugh; and a figure, rolled up like a

ball, making a sunset over the rocks and stones, lighted close by my feet. "Buon giorno, Signor Capitano! he, he! ho, ho! fine evening, eh?"

Like a gigantic toad, Gaspere Truffi stood before me, with his long matted hair waving over his frightful visage, his torn cassock revealing a leathern baldrick, furnished with pistols, poniard, and horn. Like the very demon of the storm, he whooped and yelled. A broad-leaved hat, of the largest size, overshadowing his figure like an umbrella, gave a peculiarly droll effect to his aspect.

"A delightful evening!" he croaked; "how does our Calabrian weather agree with your stomach, Signor Inglese? Ill, I think, to judge from that lugubrious visage of thine. Olà, Lancelloti! come hither and behold the good padre confessor, who came so devoutly to worm a story out of you in the bishop's vaults: he, he! ho, ho! Feel you how the ground shakes?" he added, stamping his shapeless feet on the quaking turf; "feel you how earth and air tremble? Ammirando! there is a rebellion in hell,—for our good friend, the devil, is gone to the witch-tree at Benevento to-night: ha, ha!"

"Beard of Mahomet!" cried a distant voice, "where are you, cursed crookback?" and at that moment I saw my friend of the vaults advancing towards us, clad in the usual brigand costume, with malice in his eye, and a cocked rifle in his hand. Other figures, like dim ghosts, appeared through the dark misty vapour that floated round us, and I knew that we had fallen in with a party of banditti.

"Come on, comrades," cried Truffi; "here is a calesso, containing, I doubt not, the Signora Bianca, whom we all know of. Viva! a prize worth a thousand scudi!" He advanced to the door of the carriage, but, with the butt of his pike, Gask dealt him a blow which levelled him on the turf. Uttering a yell, he rushed like a lion upon his assailant, who, not expecting so vigorous an onset from a figure so decrepit, was taken completely by surprise, and deprived of his weapon, which Truffi snapped like a reed, rending the tough ash-pole to threads with his sharp teeth and long bony fingers.

He drew his stiletto; and I, narrowly escaping a rifle-shot from Lancelloti, closed with the hideous dwarf, whose insulting demeanour had roused both my hatred and anxiety.

Though once before, in a personal struggle, I had obtained convincing proof of his wondrous strength, I disdained to use my sabre against him, but, striking the poniard from his hand, endeavoured to hurl him to the earth, by grasping his leather girdle. In vain! his short bandy legs upheld his shapeless body, like pillars of steel, while his strong and ample hands grasped me like grappling-irons.

Lancelloti advanced with his clubbed rifle, but Gask assailed him with his sword, and I was left to deal with Truffi alone. I heard the cries of Bianca during the lulls of the storm, and my anxiety was great: the sbirri had all disappeared, the misty figures were rapidly increasing in form and number, and shouts rang through the echoing wood. At this most critical moment, when engaged in a desperate struggle, the earth shook under our feet, and a sensation, like an electric shock, shot over every nerve. We paused, and glared fiercely at each other.

Again, there was a rumbling in the lurid air above, and the quivering earth beneath,—yet we relaxed not our vice-like grasp. What a moment it was! The shaking rocks, the waving trees, and the whole country around us, were torn by one of those mighty convulsions so common to the Calabrias.

Never shall I forget my sensations when, within a yard of where we struggled, the earth gaped and rent, showing an awful chasm, about twenty feet wide: my heart forgot to beat—my blood curdled! From the gap, there arose a thin sulphury light, illuminating the trees above, and the distant dingles of the wood, shining on the wet trunks and glistening leaves; showers of sparks and columns of smoke arose from it, with balls of ignited matter, which hissed in succession as they rose and fell, or exploded among the wet foliage of the forest. Beautiful was its aspect, when illuminated by the mysterious yellow glare of that smoky chasm, and I saw the distorted form of Truffi, in strong outline, between it and me. I felt his grasp tightening: we were near the gulf, and I read his hellish purpose in the twinkling of his red, hollow eyes. Gathering all my strength for one tremendous effort,—great beyond my hopes,—I flung him from me into the flaming chasm, but the shock threw me prostrate on the turf. I leaped up: Truffi had vanished in that appalling grave, which was

now closing rapidly, and soon shut altogether; the sparks and ignited matter arose no more, and the wood became involved in double gloom.

Dismayed at the horrible living tomb which had so suddenly engulfed the hunchback, Lancelloti shrank back, and I leaned against the carriage, overcome with my own emotions. The wind was dying away—the heavy pine-branches hung down motionless. One voice alone broke the stillness,—it was that of the Scottish serjeant, who prayed devoutly. Though as brave a fellow as ever drew sword, he was terrified at that moment.

We soon heard the galloping of hoofs, and the decurione, with the ten sbirri, came back, upon which Lancelloti and his company disappeared, and we saw them no more that night.

“The carriage-horses?” I inquired.

“O, signor! they have all rushed over the cliffs of Palmi, and perished in the sea,” replied the breathless sbirro.

“Bianca!” I exclaimed, “O God, what a fate you have escaped! Signor decurione, never can I sufficiently reward you, for desiring the horses to be unharnessed so soon!” I shook the hand of the sbirro, while my heart sank, at the contemplation of what might have happened.

It was long ere Bianca recovered from the horrors of that night,—which, indeed, were such as might have shaken a stouter heart than that of the gentle Italian girl.

We reached Seminara with great difficulty, dragging the calesso by the saddle-horses; but, on obtaining mules at the Greek abbey, we again set out for Scylla, *via* Bag-nara, where, soon afterwards, I had a sharp encounter with the voltigeurs of the 23rd regiment (French).

CHAPTER LIII.

A MILITARY HONEYMOON.

On the day after assuming my command at Scylla, I ordered out the little garrison in heavy marching order, and found it to consist of picked young fellows of my own regiment, 250 file, with five officers. This small party, with the garrisons at Reggio and Crotona, Amanthea and Monteleone, formed the whole force left in Calabria, with orders to defend their several posts to the last extremity. The last four places were held by Italians alone.

I found that every means had been taken to render the famous rock, and the stronghold of the race of Ruffo, yet more impregnable. In place of the princely cardinal's banner, our gaudy union spread its scarlet folds to the wind, the mighty breach—to me the scene of an adventure never, never to be forgotten—was now closed up, and a strong stone bastion, surmounted by six iron twenty-four-pounders, frowned grimly in its stead.

We were often visited by Santugo and his bride; he belonged to the Reggio garrison, which was commanded by the prince of St. Agata. My brother officers were all agreeable men, and the time passed very pleasantly. Bianca's residence shed quite a halo over the formal barrack and rugged castello, which was enlivened by a continual round of fair visitors from Fiumara, Reggio, and the neighbouring villas. Those gay subs who had looked forward with repugnance to detachment duty in the gloomy castle of Cardinal Ruffo, became delighted with the station and the gaiety of the entertainments. The towers rang perpetually with the dulcet voices of Italian girls, the twangling of mandolins, or the notes of the piano. Every evening, the hall—where the ambitious cardinal had formed his deep-laid schemes of political intrigue, where his mailed ancestors had drunk "the red wine through the helmet barred," and where the Norman knight and Saracen emir had met hand-to-hand in deadly strife—was the scene of a waltz or quadrille party, or sang to the mad and merry tarantella, the modern remnant of the ancient bacchanalian dance. Never, since the days

of Faunus, Saturn's fabled son, Ausonia's oldest king, had the rock of Scylla witnessed such a continuance of festivity.

Amid this joyous career, we had all a narrow escape from malice and treason.

One evening, Gask appeared with a very long face, and informed me that the castle well had been poisoned, for the purpose of destroying us all. Twenty men lay sick in hospital, and a cry of rage went through the whole castle.

"Poisoned—O, lord!" cried Gascoigne, who was with me at the time, and snatching up a decanter of brandy, he nearly drained it at one gulp. Gask had seen a man in the garb of the *Compagnia di Morti* prowling about the margin of the well, whom we had no doubt was the perpetrator of the villany. While I was making inquiries and despatching parties in pursuit of him, Oliver Lascelles entered my room with a drawing in his hand.

Oliver was an artist, and a complete enthusiast in Italian scenery, and still more so in Italian women; every moment stolen from duty, was devoted to the pencil, and many of his warmly-tinted sketches, done in a masterly manner, are at this moment in my portfolio. I have often admired his coolness, when, under a heavy fire, he has seated himself to sketch the enemy's position, a striking ruin, a fallen column, or piece of ancient sculpture, from which his sword had scraped the moss.

"Behold a portrait of our friend of the *Compagnia di Morti*," said he, displaying his drawing. "I saw the rogue seated by the fountain, and admiring his picturesque costume, and his striking countenance, with well-knit brows, the eyes deep set in the head, and having that determined scowl which is esteemed so classic, I gave the fellow a ducat to sit; so here you have his features fairly done in crayon."

"The scoundrel! they are those of Navarro, the Italian engineer, who deserted to the French, after assassinating the Maltese knight, in mistake for me. He is no doubt employed by Massena as a spy upon us. By heaven, Lascelles, if I had the rascal here I think I could pistol him this instant!"

"That would make a spirited sketch, too; but he cannot be far off, and Gask, with his party, will probably capture him."

I resolved to hold a drum-head court-martial on him the moment he fell into our hands, and promised twenty guineas to his capturer. But we saw him no more, for a time, at least; and, to prevent such attempts in future, I placed a sentinel at the fountain, which, after a time, became purified. Macnesia's skill saved the twenty soldiers, who were brought almost to the brink of the grave; they had all narrowly escaped death, as a quantity of acquetta was found in the water, when Macnesia analyzed it.

To expatiate on the happiness I enjoyed at Scylla, would be too common-place, and I have a great press of other matter to relate. Rumours of Massena's advance from Cassano, and the retreat and dispersion of the chiefs of the Masse, spread dismay through all the lower province, and roused us from our short dream of pleasure. All families of rank again returned to Palermo, but a few spirited cavaliers retired to the savage fastnesses of the hills, where the brave paesani and wild banditti made common cause against the invader. The arrival of a detachment of the royal artillery, brought from Messina, by the *Delight*, and a despatch from Major-General Sherbrooke, directing me to "defend Scylla, while one stone stood upon another," caused me to make the most strenuous preparations for a vigorous resistance, being anxious to render myself worthy of the important trust reposed in me—the defence of the key of the Italian Peninsula.

The presence of Bianca was the only damper to my ardour, for I anticipated with dread the dangers to which she would be exposed, when the coming strife closed around us; but to my earnest entreaties that she would join her aunt and the young viscontessa, who had retired to Carolina's court at Palermo, she answered only by her tears and entreaties, that I would not send her away, but permit her to share all the perils to which I might be exposed. Poor girl! little knew she of war, and the manifold horrors of a protracted siege, or a fortress carried by assault; but to resist her charming entreaties was impossible, and my anxiety increased as the distance between us and the enemy lessened. How marriage spoils the *esprit du corps*! Every officer and private of the 62nd looked forward with ardour and hope, and I felt the old reckless spirit rising, notwithstanding the fears that oppressed me.

The daily arrival of couriers from the Masse, and from the armed cavalieri on the mountains, the telegraphing of despatches to and fro with Messina, the hourly training of soldiers at the batteries, the visiting of guards, which were doubled at night, and all the eternal hubbub created by the near approach of the foe, kept me fully occupied; and never, even when tenanted by the martial cardinal, had Scylla witnessed such military bustle and excitement.

Advices soon reached us, that General Regnier had invested the castle of Crotona, which, after a bold defence by the Free Calabri, had been compelled to capitulate, when the heavy battering-train of the French opened on its decayed fortifications. All Naples was exasperated by the intelligence, that the gallant Cavaliere del Castagno had been hanged as a traitor, by orders of Regnier, whose forces, eager to revenge the triumph of Maida, marched rapidly by the shores of the Adriatic; they crossed the mountains at Francavilla, fighting every inch of the way with the Masse, and the bold comrades of Francatripa, Frà Diavolo, Benincasa, and Mamnone, and reached Monteleone, which the Italians abandoned, and once more the tricolour of the Buonapartists was triumphantly hoisted on its ramparts.

CHAPTER LIV.

WRECK OF THE "DELIGHT."

TOWARDS the end of December, the French had pushed forward as far as Seminara, and, by the concentration of troops, and a train of heavy ordnance at that place, I had no doubt that preparations were making to besiege the castle of Scylla. Every exertion was made by the loyalists to prevent the carriage of cannon into that corner of Calabria; working-parties of soldiers and armed peasants were continually employed in trenching and barricading the roads, and rendering the passes of the Solano impracticable, thus making every approach down from the hills of Milia as difficult as possible.

Along these heights and passes, I stationed strong bodies of armed Calabrese, intrusting the defence of the

Solano to the Cavaliere di Casteluccio, who, since his escape, had distinguished himself on a thousand occasions; so miraculous were his adventures, that the superstitious provincials believed he had been rendered bullet-proof by the witches of Amato. But so overwhelming was the force of Regnier, that all attempts to bar the passage of his train proved, ultimately, unavailing.

On the last day of that eventful year, the glitter of arms and the pale white smoke of musketry were seen spreading over the Milia hills, between the peaks of which the morning sun poured down his strong and ruddy light on the scene of contest. The drums beat, and we got under arms. Our Calabrian out-piquets and fatigue-parties were driven down from the mountains by three battalions of French infantry, led by General Milette, and were pursued by four squadrons of hussars, until close under cover of our twenty-four-pounders.

Regnier was now in complete possession of those important heights, and his working-parties were daily and nightly employed in repairing or forming roads for the conveyance of their battering-train from Seminara. Their operations were retarded and rendered perilous by the incessant attacks of the followers of Casteluccio and Fracatripa; but a damper was given to our zeal by the surrender of a numerous garrison at Reggio, where an Italian force, under the prince of St. Agata, capitulated, after a brief resistance. The castle of St. Amanthea, a property of the prince di Bisignano, was captured by assault, after a desperate defence, by the gay Captain Piozzi; he was slain by a cannon-ball, and thus the fair and fickle Despina was once more left a widow. On—on pressed the foe. The banner of Ferdinand IV. had sunk from every rampart in Calabria, save the solitary stronghold of Scylla. We found ourselves alone, and could hope for little from resistance, as all the forces of Massena were pouring southward, with orders to capture it, at every risk of life and expense of blood.

Every night the sky was streaked with fire, showing where Favazina, Fiumara, San Batello, and many a hamlet were given to the flames, after being ravaged by the foragers of the enemy, and every breeze bore past us the cries of slaughtered men, and the shrieks of miserable women.

The fall of Reggio was first announced to us by seeing Santugo's battalion of the Calabri retreating upon Scylla, in solid square, pursued by cavalry, and galled by three curricule-guns, which followed them at a gallop, and were discharged from every eminence that afforded an opportunity of sending a shot into the retiring column; on its arrival, it occupied the half-ruined town below us.

Shortly afterwards, four Sicilian gun-boats, each carrying a twenty-four-pounder in its bow, were captured by the enemy, close by Scylla; and these cannon were landed, and added to the train against the fortress. The moment it was known they had fallen into Regnier's hands, the *Delight* sloop of war, commanded by Captain Hanfield, stood close in shore, to recapture them, and we watched her operations, from the ramparts, with the greatest interest.

Although the last day of December, it was a beautiful evening, and the golden Straits were gleaming in the light of the setting sun, then verging through a sky of the purest azure, towards the green and lofty mountains which rise behind the spires and towers of Messina. The French beached the gun-boats in succession; and, covered by field-pieces and surrounded by squadrons of cavalry, we feared the sailors of the *Delight* would never cut them out or destroy them. Protected by the ship's broadside, three well-armed boats put off from her, and pulled shoreward, with the gallant intention of spiking the gun-boats' artillery, at all risks.

Fire flashed incessantly from the red port-holes of the *Delight*, and the white smoke of her cannon, rising through her taut rigging in fantastic curls, rolled away over the still bosom of the glassy Straits. The shot of the French field-pieces fell in a shower round her advancing boats; and wherever a ball plunged into the bright ocean, a pillar of liquid, like a water-spout, reared into the air with a hollow roar. A dozen of those crystal columns shot up their foamy heads at every moment, as the sailors pulled steadily towards the beach. In the headmost boat waved a large union-jack; and beside it, in the stern-sheets, sat Hanfield, waving his sword and cheering on his men. Close in his wake came the other boats, crowded with red and blue jackets, and glittering with boarding-pikes, bayonets, and cutlasses; while the glistenine blades of the feathered oars flashed like silver

in the sunlight, as they rose and fell in measured time, shooting the swift boats onward.

Crowding on the ramparts, the 62nd cheered, and threw their caps into the air. A response arose from the deck of the distant sloop, when lo! a most unlooked-for misfortune took place. Scylla, that place of horror and mystery to the ancient mariner, and before whose "yawning dungeon" Æneas and Ulysses quailed with terror, was still fraught with danger. Under a press of canvas, the *Delight* sailed obliquely, to keep company with her boats; there was a stiff breeze blowing straight from Sicily, and she stood close along shore, with every inch of her snowy canvas filled, when we beheld her shaken by a tremendous shock; her stately masts shook like willow wands, her long pendant fluttered, her broad sails shivered in the breeze, and she careened suddenly over. An exclamation burst from every lip.

"Ashore!" cried the soldiers, with sorrow and dismay, as her tall fore-topmast fell overboard; the main and the mizen followed it with a hideous crash; the beautiful vessel, which a moment before had been sailing so smoothly and swan-like, so trimly and saucily, lay a dismasted wreck, bulged on a sunken rock within a few furlongs of the beach, with her lee-guns buried in the water, and all her seamen and marines who were not floundering in the wreck around her, clinging to her windward bulwarks.

A triumphant *vivat!* burst from the enemy, who plied their field-pieces with redoubled ardour; and a cry, loud, fierce, and hoarse, answered from the English boats. The oarsmen paused, and the utmost confusion took place; there seemed a doubt whether to advance to the attack, or return to the assistance of their drowning messmates. Exasperated by the wreck of his dashing vessel, and filled with a desire for vengeance, the gallant Hanfield (an officer of great professional knowledge, and high individual worth) ordered the boats to advance, but his efforts were fruitless. His craft were soon crippled by the French cannon-shot and grape, which killed or wounded the majority of his force before it came near the Sicilian prizes. Hanfield, with many of his sailors, was killed, and Captain Seecombe, of the *Glatton* frigate, who happened to be on board the *Delight*, received a severe wound, of which he died a few days after. The b

crews were all captured; and those men on the wreck went off in two remaining boats, to save themselves from the same fate. To prevent Regnier from using the cannon remaining in the *Delight*, in prosecution of the siege, the moment it was dark enough, I left the sea-staircase, in a boat, with ten soldiers, and setting fire to the vessel, burned her to the water's edge; so ended this catastrophe, which shed a gloom over us all for some time.

CHAPTER LV

THE VOLTIGEURS.—THE MASSACRE OF BAGNARA.

IL Cavaliere di Casteluccio, some of whose followers still hovered about the Solano, having sent me accurate information of the position and arrangement of Regnier's outpost at Bagnara—the point nearest to us in his possession, and held by the voltigeurs of the 23rd (French) light infantry—I concerted a plan to form a junction with the cavaliere's Free Company, and cut off that detachment, as the castle had been quite blocked up on every side since Regnier had pushed his advanced parties as far south as Bagnara and Favasina.

On a misty night in the month of February, an hour after tattoo-beat, I marched out one hundred rank and file (more, indeed, than could be spared from my small garrison), and was joined by three times that number of the Free Calabri, led by Santugo. Guided by the distant watchfires of General Millette's piquets, which formed a fiery chain along the Milia heights, we moved by the most unfrequented paths and gorges; the last were numerous enough, as the whole country bore traces of that terrible convulsion of nature, which, twenty-four years before, engulfed Bagnara and three thousand of its inhabitants. Hideous scours and chasms rent in the sandstone rocks and salt-hills, together with the banks of vapour exhaled from the marshes, completely screened our movements from the enemy, scattered parties of whom watched the operations of the banditti and the Masse (a force now rapidly melting away), who were apt at all times to beat up their quarters. The system of perpetual harassing was vigorously maintained, to prevent the forma-

tion of roads for the conveyance of their battering-tram towards the scene of the intended siege.

After a time, the night became so dark that the visconte was doubtful which was the way, as the dense vapour rolling down from the mountains cast a double gloom over everything. Opening the door of a wretched hut, I found an old crone, who dealt in spells and love-potions, spreading her shrivelled hands over the expiring embers of a few dried sticks.

"Beware, excellency, the hag is a sorceress!" said Giacomo, as I entered.

"Signora," said I, unheeding his caution, "we are in want of a guide to the olive-wood of Bagnara; can you procure us one for the service of Ferdinand and la Santa Fede?"

I glanced at her son, or grandson, a boy about fifteen, a model of that bloom and symmetry so common in the youth of Spain and Italy; he was almost naked, or clad only in skins. "Go thou, Pablo," said the crone.

"Ahi! madre," said he, shrinking back, "like my father, I may be shot by the French."

"Via—away!" she replied, sternly. The strict filial obedience exacted by the ancients yet existed in these remote provinces; so, taking his knife and pole, the youth at once prepared to accompany us.

Guided by him, we reached the neighbourhood of Bagnara about midnight, and halted in an olive-wood, situated on an eminence above the town; it was then reduced to a few cottages, occupied by the voltigeurs, who had taken all the usual means to render their post as strong as possible, by loop-holing the walls, to enfilade the approaches, and barricading the ends of the little street with trees, furniture, brushwood, and banks of earth.

"Chi è là?" cried a sonorous voice from the wood, as we entered it.

"*Italia*," answered the first file of our advanced guard, and the Cavaliere di Casteluccio rode up at the head of his company of volunteers, all bold athletic fellows, armed with rifles and poniards, and carrying their ammunition in leather pouches or large buffalo-horns.

Below us, in Bagnara, all was still; the poor doomed soldiers slept soundly; not a light twinkled, not a sound broke the silence, save the rustle of the leafless trees, or the dash of the lonely sea as it rolled on the shingly

beach. At times a red light shot across the sky to the westward; it rose from the peak of Stromboli, in the distant isles of *Æolus*. We held a council in the olive-grove, before advancing.

"Signor Casteluccio, be so good," said I, "as to describe the enemy's post."

"The voltigeurs are six hundred strong, and commanded by a Colonel Pepe ——"

"Any relation of Don Pepe?" asked the visconte, laughing.

"A tall, lantern-jawed fellow, with a scar over the left eye," said the cavaliere.

"The same," said I: "we have met before."

"He occupies the house of the podestà, a stone building, well loop-holed and barricaded; the approach to it is defended by three twelve-pounders, which sweep the principal street, and are always loaded with round and tin-case shot. A hundred voltigeurs garrison the house; the others are quartered in those adjoining; and the defensive arrangements are such, that they can all act in concert, and, like a star-fort, the post gives a cross fire at every angle."

"The safest approach?"

"Is from the seaward. There a deep rut leads directly from the shore to the town; thick foliage overhangs it, under which we can advance unseen. A single sentinel guards the point—the night is dark—you comprehend me?" added the cavaliere, smiling grimly, as he touched one of those villanous stilettoes, which his countrymen were never without.

"Ay, Signor Paolo," I replied; "once in, we will do very well; but as the voltigeurs sleep with their muskets loaded and their belts on, they will start to arms the moment the sentinel fires his piece."

"But he must be disposed of," said Santugo, coolly. "Giacomo!"

His factotum appeared immediately.

"A French sentinel occupies the ravine, through which we must advance undiscovered. He must not fire: you will see to this, as you value life."

Giacomo bowed intelligently, and was withdrawing, when the voice of Gascoigne arrested him.

"You murdering villain, come here! what the devil—will you permit this piece of rascality, Dundas?"

"Assuredly not!" said I, dismounting from Cartouche.

"I am an English officer, and not an assassin!" said Lascelles, in great wrath.

"You have both only anticipated me," I replied, "Santugo, we cannot permit the poor soldier to be slain in a manner so dastardly. No! I would rather advance under the hottest fire of musketry, than consent to it; my own soldiers at least will follow me." A murmur of assent rose from the 62nd.

"Cospetto!" exclaimed Santugo, impatiently; "and to save the life of this paltry voltigeur, who will perhaps be shot afterwards, you may sacrifice all our lives and the success of the expedition."

"I understand the scruples of our friends," replied Casteluccio; "and will undertake that, in ten minutes, Signor Dundas will have the voltigeur beside him, safe and sound; unless, indeed, he makes a great resistance; in which case, I cannot assure you of my being very patient."

In three columns we moved to the attack. Santugo with his corps marched on one flank of the post; the cavaliere, with his Free Company, on the other; with my hundred men, I chose the central point of assault by the gorge; and the report of the first volley was to be the signal for the onset. Luckily for us, a thick white vapour, rolling from the sea, enveloped all Bagnara, veiling our movements completely; the enemy had not the remotest suspicion of our vicinity. My soldiers were in light marching order, with sixty rounds of ammunition. We went down the hill double quick, and entered the gorge softly, in sections of threes. Casteluccio accompanied us, to seize the sentinel; but I had little reliance to place on the successful fulfilment of his promise.

"The sentinel once captured, we will rush upon them like a herd of wolves; and the massacre of Bagnara shall live in Calabrian story, like the Sicilian vespers of old!" said the cavaliere, in a low, hoarse tone. His eyes sparkled; he drew his poniard, and stole from my side towards the unsuspecting voltigeur, whom we discerned about fifty yards from where my party halted. Under the shade of a foliaged cliff, he stood motionless, with his musket ordered, and his eyes bent on the ground. His voice alone broke the intense stillness of his post, and had he been less occupied with his own thoughts, he must undoubtedly have

seen us; but the mind of the poor Swiss conscript was perhaps far away where his mother's vine-clad chalet looked down on the vales and cataracts of his native canton. Sadly and slowly he hummed the pastoral "*Rans des vaches*," and saw not the foe, who, crouching like a lynx, with one hand on his lip and the other on his weapon, stole softly towards him. I waited the issue with anxiety.

"Silenzio!" exclaimed the strong cavalier, in a fierce whisper, as he grasped the sentry by the throat. The poor Swiss boy (for he was but a boy, after all) understood not the word; but the sudden stifling grasp, and the sight of the glittering *bastia* poniard, almost deprived him of his faculties; taken completely by surprise, he dropped his musket, and was dragged among us, a prisoner.

"Signor, I have redeemed my promise," said the breathless Paolo. "May this be an omen of what is to follow!" He sprang up the rugged face of the gorge to rejoin his party, while mine moved forward double quick. Leading the way, sabre in hand, I scrambled over a bank of earth, a strong wicket in which led to the guard-house. We were provided with sledge-hammers, and the noise of breaking it down brought out the guard: they fired, and two soldiers fell dead beside me; we answered by a volley, and the whole cantonment was alarmed in a moment. With the charged bayonet and clubbed musket, we rushed upon the guard, which we overwhelmed and captured in a moment.

"Lascelles, take twenty men, and beat down the Seminara gate: Santugo will enter that way. Off, double quick!"

The surprise was so complete, that the resistance we encountered on every hand was faint: the guards were overpowered, the avenues beaten open, and the fierce followers of the visconte and Cavaliere Paolo spread like a pack of famished hounds over the little town; slaying all they met, without mercy or remorse.

The party occupying the podesteria gave us more trouble than we had expected. I saw Colonel Pepe, in his shirt and trousers, rush from the door to the three field-pieces, which he discharged in rapid succession, and their canister shot did terrible execution among the dense column of Calabrians rushing up the street. Ere he regained the door, a shot from a rifle arrested him; he tossed his arms wildly above his head, and then fell backwards a corpse.

The entrance was closed and barricaded, and a close and destructive fire was opened from every window, and those countless loop-holes with which the walls had been hastily perforated: flashes, smoke, and half-naked men were seen at every aperture; and the gleams of the musketry illuminated the whole place.

Aware that not a moment was to be lost, as the cavalry at Seminara or the piquets of Milette would be all under arms at the sound of the first shot, I resolved that a vigorous attempt should be made to storm the podestà's house, which, from its size and strength, had become the principal keep or stronghold of the enemy. Desiring Gascoigne, with a suitable party, to collect as many prisoners as possible, I led forward my own immediate command. Our approach was completely enfiladed by the adjoining houses, from which the French poured forth a fire with such destructive precision and rapidity, that in a few minutes the street presented a horrible spectacle, being heaped with killed and wounded, whose blood crimsoned the gutters on both sides of the way. Directing Santugo to assail the house in rear, Casteluccio and I led on a mixed force of British and Calabry; but so terrible was the leaden hail the French showered on three sides of us, that we were repulsed with immense slaughter: the cavaliere received a severe wound in the sword-arm; yet he quitted not the ground, but brandishing his sabre with his left hand, continued to animate his followers by his presence and cries of "Viva Ferdinand IV!"

Again I led forward the remnant of my party, and again we were forced to recoil, but succeeded in bringing off one of the currie-guns; with a wild shout of triumph it was wheeled round, double shotted, and discharged against the house.

"Hurrah!" cried I, almost frantic with excitement, ramming home another ball with my own hand. "Bravo! Gask, keep your hand tight on the vent—ready the match—stand clear of the recoil—fire!" and again it belched forth destruction. Thrice it was fired, and thrice the shot struck the same place; an enormous rent yawned in the wall, and a mass of masonry fell to the earth: yet the French fought with undiminished courage. The side of a room had been completely breached.

"Forward the 62nd! Advance the Calabry! On them with the bayonet—charge—hurrah!" Animated by my

example, and, notwithstanding the deadly fire poured on them from every part, onward they went, with that heroic ardour which soon after swept the armies of Napoleon from the fields of Spain and Flanders. We burst in amongst the voltigeurs, whose diminutive stature placed them at the utmost disadvantage, when opposed to English soldiers and the tall athletic Calabri in the fierce hand-to-hand combat which ensued. A desperate struggle followed. For a time the podesteria seemed shaken to its base, and in the close *mêlée* I received a severe blow from a clubbed musket: but the voltigeurs yielded themselves prisoners of war in five minutes; and my soldiers immediately encircled them, to protect them from the knives and bayonets of the infuriated Italians.

In the despatch of General Sherbrooke it is mentioned, that "in the night attack on Bagnara, the voltigeurs of the 23rd light infantry were cut to pieces." This was literally the case: so merciless were the Calabrese, that a great number of the poor Frenchmen were slaughtered in their beds (a blanket, a great coat, or a bundle of fern), and no wounded man escaped them. Of Colonel Pepe's 600 voltigeurs, 450 lay, like himself, weltering in blood, in the streets and houses of Bagnara. I did all that man could do, short of assaulting the Calabrians, to stop the horrid slaughter; but my efforts were unavailing, and the blood of these brave men was poured forth like water: the soldiers of the 62nd revolted at such cold-blooded cruelty, and expressed their indignation aloud. The poor remnant of the 23rd were moody and silent, cast down in spirit and pale in visage, ragged and half-naked, when I paraded them outside the town, just as the grey daylight brightened the Milia peaks, and the sea began to change its hue from inky grey to sparkling blue, as it rolled on the rocky promontories of Scylla and Palmi. Our casualties were numerous: but one officer, a hundred and fifty rank and file, and three pieces of cannon were the prizes of the night. To gain these, four hundred and fifty of their comrades had been destroyed; and almost in cold blood too!

CHAPTER LVI.

RETREAT IN SQUARE.—THE PRISONER OF WAR.

BORN on the morning breeze from Seminara, the distant sound of a cavalry trumpet warned us to retire with precipitation. We spiked the guns, blew up the tumbrils, and, setting the town on fire, soon destroyed all of Bagnari that the last earthquake had left unengulfed. Lighted by the red blaze which the burning houses cast on the green hills, the dark pine-woods, and the impending masses of basaltic rock frowning over mountain-streams and deep defiles, we continued our retreat double-quick, without the aid of our little guide, Pablo, who, at sound of the first shot, had vanished, without waiting for his promised reward.

"Hark to the tantara of the trumpet! Milette's cavalry brigade is coming on," said Santugo, checking his black Barbary horse and listening to the distant sound.

As he spoke, French cavalry appeared on the Seminara road, galloping in file along the narrow way by which we were hurrying towards Scylla, whose ramparts we discerned above the morning mist, about three miles off. The rising sun gleamed gaily on the long lines of shining helmets and glancing sabres, as the horsemen swept through the deep dell in close pursuit. The fire of Casteluccio's volunteers, who formed our rear-guard, served to keep them in check for a time, and impede their advance, by the fall of steeds and their riders; but on our debouchment into more open ground, I formed the whole into a compact square, with the prisoners in the centre. The cavalry now pushed on at a furious gallop, and, as they cleared the gorge, the trumpeters sounded in succession "form squadron;" the right files trotted, while the left swept round at full speed; and the moment each troop formed, it rushed upon us with a force and impetuosity which must have stricken terror into the Calabrese; but the proud troopers recoiled before the levelled bayonets and steady fire of a few brave men of my own corps, who formed the rearward face of the square.

Successively the six squadrons of a whole corps of light cavalry swept after us, and successively they were compelled to break into subdivisions, and retire to the right

and left, round the flanks of their column, while the next in order advanced to the charge. They suffered severely; both horses and riders lay rolling in heaps, while we lost not a man, as the troopers never fired their pistols; probably to spare their countrymen who were our prisoners. Just as a brigade of horse-artillery came at a gallop from the dell, and were wheeled round on an eminence, to open upon us, we gained the shelter of a pine-thicket, and in perfect safety retired leisurely upon Scylla.

Castelluccio's band—whose retreat to their fastnesses in the Solano the advance of Milette's cavalry had completely cut off—I added to the garrison of the town. The wound of the brave cavaliere was severe, and a musket-ball had broken his left arm. Our surgeon, Macknesia, reduced the fracture; but the patient was quite unserviceable, and therefore retired for a time to Messina.

After the transmission of our prisoners and wounded to the same place, in the boats of the *Electra* frigate, I gladly retired to my quarters, where the joy and tenderness of Bianca soon made me forget the excitement and weariness of the past night. That evening the mist, which had all day hovered over land and sea, cleared away, when we plainly saw the French working-parties on the mountains, forming the road from Seminara, under the protection of strong escorts of cavalry and infantry.

Occasionally a puff of white smoke, curling from the brow of a cliff or from a neighbouring thicket, and an immediate commotion among the enemy, announced a sudden shot from a concealed Calabrian rifle, which had struck one from the roll of the soldiers of the empire. Banditti, and broken parties of the Masse, stuck like burrs in the skirts of the French; and the loss of life occasioned by such desultory warfare was immense.

Bianca shuddered as she surveyed the distant foe and glanced at the castle batteries below us, where, in regular order, stood the long lines of iron twenty-fours and thirty-twos, with all the accompaniments of rammers, sponges, and handspikes; pyramids of balls occupying the spaces between. The glittering bayonets shone on every bastion and angle; while the numerous sentinels, and the hourly rounds of the watchful commanders of guards, denoted an alertness and excitement, a vicinity

of warfare, equally appalling and novel to her. Whilst we were watching all these preparations, a little drummer beat the warning for the "evening retreat;" the sharp rattle of his drum agitated Bianca so much, that she burst into tears, and, sinking on my shoulder, exclaimed, "Oh, Claude! would to God we were safe at Palermo! All this is indeed terrible."

"All *this*!" I reiterated. "Faith! Bianca, I see nothing terrible here. The guards on the alert, the cannon in order, the duty carried on strictly, all bespeak the orderly garrison. But if the mere sight of these things and the clatter of that little boy's drum affright you, think what will be your terrors when yonder hill bristles with brigades of cannon, vomiting death and fire; when every point around us glitters with steel, and even the roar of Dragara is lost in that of the conflict; when men are falling like ripe grapes in a storm, and the shot flying thick as hail, rending battlement and tower. Oh! think of all these dangers, dear one; and, once more, let me entreat you—implore you, to retire to Messina. Consent, Bianca; and I will this moment order a gun to fire for the *Electra's* boat."

"And you counsel me to leave you so soon?" said she, bending her soft eyes on mine.

"Your gentle mind cannot conceive the horrors of a siege. Scylla I must defend to the last, for such are my orders; but how long can such a little fortress withstand the mighty army of Massena? Our separation, Bianca, can only be for a time——"

"Caro Claude, for a time—but how long? You may be taken prisoner and carried to Don Pepe's dungeons in Dalmatia, and I may never see you again. When I think of poor Benedetto's fate—oh horror! Say no more, Claude; death only shall separate us."

The entrance of Bob Brown or Annina (they now composed our entire household) put an end to this pathetic interview. Bianca smiled through her tears, and looked so beautiful and happy, and love made me so selfish, that I said no more of her retiring to Sicily.

The evening was sunny and still, the air serene, and the sea calm, except round the rock of Scylla. The green Sicilian shore rose up, clearly and distinctly, from the azure ocean, and the sails of the *Amphion*, the *Electra*, the *Glatton*, the *Pompey*, and all our numerous war-ships

which studded the Straits, shone white as snow in the sunbeams; while Sicilian gun-boats, slave-galleys, and xebecques dotted the sea between; the cloudless sky, and the range of hills which terminates at the Faro, formed the background. Our casements were open, and the setting sun poured his bright rays into the castle-hall, the roof of which was covered with the dilapidated frescoes of Matteo Prette, and the faded coats armorial of the princes of Ruffo Scylla. It was a noble relic of other days. Massive Ionic columns of Sicilian marble, with bases of green Corsican jasper, rising from a tessellated floor, supported its arched roof; between these, in niches, were some rare pieces of ancient sculpture, dug from the ruins of the neighbouring Columna Rhagini; or, perhaps, relics of that edifice which Anaxilaus, its prince, first raised on the rock, to defend him against the warriors of Tuscany. The early flowers of a warm Italian spring were blooming in the balconies, and their sweet perfume was wafted around us.

Bianca was seated at work, brocading a piece of scarlet Palmi silk, while I lounged on a sofa, reading the last "*Gazetta Britannica*;" a silver caraffa of the cardinal's muscadel stood close at hand, and I thought, while knocking the ashes from my third cigar, that my situation on the staff would be a very pleasant one, if Monsieur le Général Regnier contented himself by remaining intrenched at Cassano, instead of beating up my quarters at the extremity of lower Italy.

A smart single knock at the door announced Serjeant Gask.

"Mr. Lascelles has sent me to say, sir, that the officer taken prisoner at Bagnara, who wished to be sent to Dalmatia on parole, appears to be an Italian."

"The rascal!" I exclaimed; "but perhaps he is a Roman, or Venetian."

"He says the last, sir; but I could swear that he is a Calabrian born and bred."

"Bring him here, with a file of the barrier guard, that I may examine him myself."

Gask retired, and in five minutes returned with the prisoner—a sullen and dogged-like fellow, wearing a plain French uniform, blue, with scarlet facings, an aiguillette, and shoulder-scales. He was swarthy, and his lank mustaches gave him a melancholy aspect, while the

rolling of his restless eyes announced that he was very ill at ease.

On his entrance with the escort, Bianca withdrew. Imagine my surprise, on recognizing Pietro Navarro, who grew deadly pale on beholding me.

"Good evening! Signor Navarro," said I; "I did not expect to meet a descendant of the worthy inventor of mines under circumstances so degrading."

"I am Pepe Biada, a Venetian, bearing a commission in the artillery of the emperor. You are making some mistake, signor, and I warn you to beware of reprisals. A heavy brigade of guns is already *en route* for Scylla, which cannot hold out a day against the forces now marching on it—no, San Martino!—not a single day."

"San Marteenno? ha! the true Neapolitan twang, that," I exclaimed. "How many men are moving on this point."

"Six thousand, exclusive of artillery, horse, and sappers," he answered, gruffly. "I demand, signor, as a Venetian in the service of the king of Italy, that I may be permitted to retire, on my parole of honour." He spoke boldly, and seemed to imagine that his information had staggered me a little.

"You must first be examined by a military court-martial. I have not forgotten that night when you poniarded the brave cavaliere of Malta, in mistake for me. On clearing yourself of that, and several other gross misdemeanours, you will be transmitted to Sicily, to be treated as the government shall deem fit. You will be good enough to hand me your sabretache? Take him away, Gask, and guard him well—he deserves no mercy. Give Captain Gascoigne my compliments—send him here, and desire the orderly drum to beat for orders."

Navarro, finding that his assertions of innocence were made to one who was too well convinced of his guilt, in silence unbuckled his belt, threw it with the sabretache towards me, and retired with his escort. From its bulk and weight, I thought it contained something of importance; but found only an Italian work on engineering by Donato Rosetta, the canon of Livournia, together with a few sketches of forts and roads. One of these was important enough; it showed the castle of Scylla, with the positions to be occupied by the French cannon; their pro-

posed approaches and trenches were laid down, and our weakest points were marked. This document was a fresh cause for exasperation: from his knowledge of the fortress and its locality, Navarro must have been of the utmost use to General Regnier; and I was determined to bring him to trial without delay. My process was harsh; but let the peculiar nature of my position, the power with which I was vested, and Navarro's crimes, excuse it.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE DRUM-HEAD COURT-MARTIAL.

I PARADED the whole of the little garrison, and ordering a drum-head court to assemble immediately, wrote the charges on which the prisoner was to be arraigned before it: but I was interrupted by an outcry and combat in the guard-house. Snatching the sword from Gask's belt, he had attempted to stab him, and break away by force; but the soldiers beat him down with the butts of their muskets, and he was secured with handcuffs, an iron bar, and a padlock.

Formed in close column, the whole garrison, including the Free Corps of Santugo (who, although their lieutenant-colonel was, oddly enough, under my orders), paraded to hear and behold the proceedings. So exasperated were the Calabri, that the presence of British soldiers alone prevented them from sacrificing the unhappy Navarro, and thus destroying all that judicial form which I meant to give to our proceedings.

In centre of the castle court was placed a drum, with a Bible, pens, ink, and paper, upon it. The president stood on one side, and the members on his right and left hand; Navarro, with his escort, stood opposite. I had to act in the triple capacity of prosecutor, witness, and approver. The paper found attached to the poniard in Castelfermo's bosom, the likeness of Navarro, disguised as one of the Compagnia di Morti, together with the contents of his sabretache, I laid before the court for examination.

Brief as the proceedings of such a tribunal always are,

ours were necessarily unusually so: a forward movement was at that moment being made by the French cavalry, and we were pressed for time. The following is a literal transcript of the short and singular document indited by Lascelles on that occasion: it is still in my possession:—

“Proceedings of a drum-head court-martial, held on PIETRO NAVARRO, late of the Sicilian Engineers, by order of Captain DUNDAS, 62nd regiment, Commandant of the Castle of Scylla.

“The court being duly sworn, and having weighed and considered the evidence against the prisoner and his defence, are of opinion that he, Pietro Navarro, is guilty of the following charges:—

“*First.* Of assassinating Marco di Castelermo, a knight commander of Malta, and captain of the Free Corps.

“*Second.* Desertion to the enemy.

“*Third.* Conspiring with rebels to destroy the Villa d'Alfieri.

“*Fourth.* Poisoning the well of H. M. castle of Scylla, and thereby endangering the lives of the garrison.

“*Sentence.* To be shot or hanged, as the commandant shall direct.

“MEMBERS.

“PAT. GASCOIGNE, Capt. 62nd Regt. Pres.

“O. LASCELLES, Lieut. 62nd Regt.

“PELHAM VILLIERS, Lieut. 62nd Regt.

“CONTE D'ARENA, Lieut. Free Corps.

“CONTE DI PALMA, Lieut. Free Corps.

“*Scylla, Feb. 1808.*”

To this I affixed my signature, with the fatal words “*confirmed—to be shot.*” Navarro grew pale as death when I laid down the pen; and, as I gave the command, forming the close column into a hollow square, by marching it to the front and wheeling the subdivisions of the central companies outward, he seemed to receive an electric shock. He moved mechanically to the front, when I desired Lascelles, who acted as our adjutant, to read the brief proceedings. So flagrant were his crimes, that to have yielded him one privilege as an officer, was not even

to be thought of, and he was treated in every respect as a private soldier.

Oliver read the proceedings and sentence, first in English, and then in Italian; Navarro listened with dogged silence, knowing well that entreaties were useless if made to the stern military tribunal before which he found himself so suddenly arraigned. His lip quivered, and his brow blanched, when the last words "to be shot," fell upon his ear, and he gave me a dull, inquiring stare, as I folded the paper and thrust it into my sabretache. Though my glance was firm and my voice never quavered, I felt for the poor wretch, undeserving as he was. He hovered on the brink of eternity, and my lips were to utter the command which would at once send him into the presence of his Creator.

Mine—there was something terrible in the idea: I paused for a moment; a beam of hope lightened his gloomy eyes and brow. The place was so still, that one might have heard a pin fall: but delay was cruel.

"Unhappy man!" said I, "you have heard the opinion and sentence of the court. The latter must be carried into execution in twenty minutes, and it would be well to employ that little time in pure repentance, and in solemn prayer."

"O, omnipotente!" he exclaimed, raising up his eyes and fettered hands, "in twenty minutes, can so many years of sin and enormity be repented of? O, San Giovanni, thou, whose most holy order I have outraged! O, San Marco the glorious! Eufemio the martyred! and thou, sweetest Madonna! intercede for me with One whom I am unworthy to address!"

Deeply touched with his tone, I turned to Santugo: but he was too much used to hear such pious ejaculations on every frivolous occasion, to care a straw about them; and, leaning on his sabre, he surveyed the culprit with a stern glance of distrust and contempt.

"Down on your knees, villain!" he exclaimed, "and pray with a will; for I fear you are standing on the brink of eternal damnation!"

"O, horror!" cried Navarro; and, losing all self-possession, he sank on his knees, and began to repeat his pater-noster with great devotion.

"I regret that we have here no priest of the Catholic church to attend you in this terrible hour," said I, "but

yonder is a good and worthy soldier who has once been in holy orders, and if his prayers ——”

“Away!” cried Navarro, as Gask took a Bible from his haversack, and, laying his grenadier cap aside, advanced towards him. “Better a Turk, than a Jew; but, in such an hour as this, better the devil than a heretic! Away, accursed! I spit upon you! I will trust rather to my own prayers than thy intercessions ——”

“I presume not to intercede,” said poor Gask, meekly, as he closed the Bible; “I am but an humble soldier, though I have seen better days; and I am a sinner, doubtless, though never committing sin wilfully. I entreat your permission to accompany you in prayer, to soothe your last moments, in such wise that, through the blessed mercy of the Lord of Hosts ——”

“Ghieu, setanasso!” screamed the assassin, quite beside himself; “away, heretic! Better the most ribald monk of Pistoja than such as thee!”

“Fall back, Gask; the man is frantic,” said I. “Tell off a section, with their arms loaded; desire the pioneers to dig a grave in the cardinal’s bastion, and their corporal to bind up the prisoner’s eyes.”

Gask saluted, and retired to obey, while the prisoner, covering his face with his fettered hands, appeared to be engaged in the deepest prayer. The men of the 62nd evinced considerable repugnance to become his executioners, such a duty being always reserved as a punishment for bad or disorderly soldiers, and there was not one among them who could be deemed to come under either of these denominations. A whisper circulated through the ranks, and I knew that I was imposing an unpleasant duty upon good men. The visconte divined my dilemma.

“Dundas,” said he, “as Italians, let ours be the task to punish this wretch, whom I blush to acknowledge a countryman! Giacomo, take twenty of our corps, and shoot him through the back; but unbind his hands, that he may tell over his beads once more before he dies.”

Giacomo selected his marksmen, and drew them up opposite a high wall, before which Navarro knelt, about thirty paces from them. As the Calabrians loaded, two pioneers with a shovel and pickaxe approached; and on seeing them, the prisoner seemed seized with a frenzy. Suddenly he sprang up, and fled towards a parapet-wall with the fleetness of a hare, and a scene of the utmost con-

fusion ensued : shot after shot was fired at him, but missed. It was madness to hope to escape from Scylla, filled as it was with armed men, enclosed on three sides by the surging sea, on the fourth by steep cliffs, and girdled by lofty towers and bastions. Frantic with desperation and terror, the miserable Navarro rushed up the platform of one of the gun-batteries, and swung himself over the parapet, escaping a shower of balls aimed at him by the half-disciplined Calabri, who had all rushed in disorder to the walls : destruction dogged him close. Beneath, the cliff descended sheer to the sea three hundred feet below ; above, the parapet bristled with weapons, and was lined with hostile faces. Chilled with a sudden horror, when the dash of the foaming sea and the hollow boom of those tremendous caverns by which the rock is pierced, rang in his ears, he became stunned ; and, closing his eyes, clung to a straggling vine, or some creeping plants, with all the stern tenacity that love of life and fear of death inspire. Never shall I forget the expression of his face when I looked over the parapet upon him. It was ghastly as that of a corpse : his short black hair bristled and quivered on his scalp ; his deep dark eyes glared with terror, hatred, and ferocity, till they resembled those of a snake ; and every muscle of his face was contracted and distorted. He swung in agony over the beetling cliff, on which he endeavoured in vain to obtain a footing ; but its face receded from him, and he hung like a mason's plummet.

"Giacomo," said the visconte, "end his misery."

The Calabrian levelled his musket over the breastwork, and his aiming eye, as it glanced along the smooth barrel, met the fixed and agonized glance of Navarro. He fired. The ramparts round us, and the rocks and caves beneath, gave back the reverberated report like thunder. The ball had passed through the brain of Navarro, who vanished from the cliff and was seen no more.

So perished this unhappy traitor.

CHAPTER LVIII.

DIANORA.—THE FORFEITED HAND.

THE exciting affair with Navarro was scarcely over, before we became involved in another; which, though of a different description, caused me no little anxiety: of this my gay friend, Oliver Lascelles, was the hero.

Oliver was a handsome, good-humoured, light-hearted, curly-headed, thoughtless, young fellow; heir to one of the finest estates in Essex, with a venerable Elizabethan manor-house and deer-park, a stud of horses, and a kennel of hounds. He was a good shot, and a sure stroke at billiards; could push his horse wherever the hounds went, and, when hunting, was never known to *crane* in his life: he would spur, slap-dash over everything; and he always led the field. However, these were but the least of his good qualities: he possessed others, that were of a better order. Oliver was, every inch, an English gentleman and soldier; possessing a refined taste, and more solid acquirements than such as are necessary merely to enable a man to acquit himself in fashionable or military life: for, in truth, a very "shallow fellow" may pass muster, at times, in the ball-room, on parade, or in the hunting-field.

About this time, when Regnier's advance kept us all on the alert, Oliver, as if he had not wherewithal to occupy his thoughts, contrived to fall in love; and, to all appearance, so earnestly, that I was not long in discovering and rallying him about it. People are very prone to fall in love in that land of bright eyes: the little god Cupid is still "king of gods and men," in sunny Ausonia, where love seems to be the principal occupation of the inhabitants.

Though the advanced posts of the enemy were now pretty close to us on all sides, our fiery spark, Lascelles, went forth every evening to visit his innamorata, who dwelt in the neighbourhood of Fiumara, which had now become a French cantonment. I have elsewhere alluded to his artistic talent: he had now conceived a violent fancy for delineating Italian girls in all the glory of ruddy and dimpled cheeks, dark eyes, braided hair, and very scanty

petticoats. His apartments were strewed with such sketches, and Bianca rallied him smartly, on finding that the same pretty face was traceable in every drawing: Oliver had, evidently, one vivid and particular idea ever uppermost in his mind. He had a rival, too—a devil of a fellow—who contrived to infuse an unusual quantum of mystery into this love affair, all the perils of which I will relate to the reader, while our friends, the French, are labouring at the Seminara road, in order to bring up their train of cannon.

"Where away so fast, Oliver?" asked I, as he was hurrying past me, one evening, about dusk, muffled in his cloak.

"Only a little way from the castle," he responded, somewhat impatiently.

"Southward, eh?"

"Ah—yes."

"To Fiumara?"

"Why—yes."

"Take care, Oliver, my boy! The French 101st, a thousand strong, are cantoned there, and the end of this nightly visiting may be a few years' unpleasant captivity in Verdun or Bitche."

"Tush!" said he, impatiently; "I have my sword and pistols."

"So much the worse; they may only provoke the wrath of your captors. 'Tis a pity your fair one, Signora Montecino (that's her name, I believe), lives in so dangerous a vicinity."

"I am only going to visit the bishop of Nicastro."

"A shallow excuse, Oliver: you are not a man to relish the old bishop's society. By the bye, his niece is very pretty,—is she not?"

"Rather," said he, drily.

"So much so, that you think her face cannot be delineated too often."

"Stay, Claude, no quizzing: I won't stand it."

"She has a brother, or cousin, a sad fellow,—an outlawed guerilla, or something of that sort,—who has served under Francatipa, and is stained with a thousand nameless atrocities. And do you know what people say about the pretty signorina herself?"

"What say they?" he asked, sternly.

"That she is a nearer relation of the good padre

bishop, than he cares to have generally known: priests' nieces——"

"D——n their impudence! only yourself, Claude—Captain Dundas, I must request——"

"O, yes, I understand all that: ha, ha!"

"No man in the service——"

"What! do you really love this girl, Oliver?"

"Yes; on my honour, I do."

"Very possibly: but,—I speak as an old friend,—you do not mean seriously?"

He started, and coloured deeply.

"I know not," he muttered, hurriedly: "and yet, Claude, I cannot be so base as to think of her otherwise than as a man of honour ought to do. Her relationship to the old padre is, to say the best of it, somewhat dubious; but then, she is so good-tempered and ladylike—so gentle, so beautiful, and winning, that I cannot, for the soul of me, help loving her; and I pledged——"

"Pledged! Maladetto! as they say here, are you engaged to her?"

"Why, I did not make a particular—that is to say, not quite an engagement—pahaw! what am I talking here about?"

"I see! Ah, Oliver, you are evidently very deeply dipped with her: you cannot steal a march upon me. Let me advise you, Lascelles, to be cautious in your affair with this young lady. Your family, your fortune, all entitle you——"

"Thanks, Dundas! I don't require this tutor-like advice," said he, putting his foot in the stirrup of his roan horse, with a dash of hauteur in his manner.

"At Fiumara, the French keep a sharp look-out," I urged.

"Be it so," said he; "thither I go, at all risks."

"You are not acting wisely."

"Granted—one never does so in love."

"Be cautious, Oliver! I would be loth to lose you, and I find it will be necessary to 'come the senior over you,' as the mess say, and order that no officer or soldier shall go beyond one mile from camp or quarters."

"Do so to-morrow," he added, laughing: "but, meanwhile, ere the order is issued, I shall ride so far as Fiumara to-night. What is the parole?"

"Maida—countersign, Italy."

"Thank you: I do not wish to be fired on by the blundering Calabri," he replied, little imagining he would never require the watchword. "Adieu! by midnight I will return."

Breaking away, he leaped on his horse, and, dashing through the arched portal of the castle, rode down the hill, through Scylla, at a furious gallop.

I was under considerable apprehension for my rash friend's safety. Midnight passed—slowly the hours of morning rolled on. Day was breaking, and the peaks of Milia were burnished by the yet unrisen sun, when I visited the posts, to inquire for Lascelles. He had not returned; and, as he had never before been absent so long in such a dangerous neighbourhood, I became very uneasy: deeply I regretted that, even at the risk of unpleasant words, I had not exerted my authority as commanding officer, and compelled him to stay within the castle. The bugle sounded for morning parade at the usual hour, but Oliver Lascelles was not forthcoming—his place in the ranks was vacant.

On the advance of the French, the old bishop, before mentioned, had retired from the city of Nicastro, abandoning to them his residence—the ancient castle, famous as the place where Henry of Naples expiated his rebellion. Retiring to his little paternal villa, near Fiumara, he lived in retirement, unmolested by the French, who almost depopulated the surrounding country by their tyranny, extortions, and wanton outrage. On the side of a hill, at the base of which ran a deep and rapid stream, its banks covered with orange and citron-trees, stood the bishop's villa. It faced the Straits of Messina: high rocks and a thick wood of pines hid it from the view of the foe at Fiumara, otherwise, their forage-parties would assuredly have paid it a visit.

On the evening I last saw Oliver, a young lady was visible at an open window of this mansion. She was alone, and seated, in a reclining posture, on an ottoman, upon which lay her guitar; her hair, half-braided, half-disordered, rolled in natural ringlets of the deepest black over a neck of the purest white—so pure, so transparent, that the blue veins beneath were distinctly visible. She was not tall, but of a full and beautifully-rounded form;

and though her features were not regular, yet their expression was very captivating and piquant. Her eyes were dark and brilliant, her lips full and pouting, her cheeks flushed and dimpled.

Notwithstanding the season of the year, the air was close and still; the sun had set, and the sky wore a warm and fiery tinge, but the hills and wood were of a dark bronze hue.

Dianora Montecino listened impatiently. She awaited the coming of Oliver,—but he came not. She often surveyed her figure in a mirror which hung opposite, and a calm smile lighted up her pretty face: it was one of complacent but innocent admiration of her own attractions. Her hair being in partial disorder, languidly, with her delicate fingers, she endeavoured to adjust it; then pausing, she sighed, and, after again consulting the friendly mirror, with a pardonable coquetry, she allowed the flowing tresses to remain free.

“He always prefers me in dishabille. That seems strange,—and yet I think I really look better so. But truly, Signor Oliver, you tarry long to-night.”

The last flush of sunlight vanished from the hills of Milia (or Mylæ), and now rose the bright moon, shedding its softer light over land and sea, tinging the Straits with silver lustre, and revealing the Sicilian feluccas, with their striped latteen sails, and other picturesque vessels, which the sombre shadows of evening had for a time obscured. At the base of the hills, the river wound between rocks and thickets, its surface reflecting the innumerable stars that studded the serene blue sky. A beautiful fountain, beneath the terrace, threw up its jet of water, like a ceaseless shower of diamonds; the air was laden with the perfume of the earliest flowers of an Italian spring, and not a breath of wind was abroad to stir their closed petals, then filled with fragrant dew. Intently the young girl hearkened for the tramp of her lover's horse,—but he came not: she heard only the tumultuous beating of her own heart, and the monotonous plash of the water falling from the bronze Triton's mouth into the marble basin below.

A step was heard softly on the gravel walk.

“At last he comes!” she said, pouting, while joy and hope sparkled in her dark and liquid eyes. A man leaped

over the balustrade of the terrace. "Dear Oliver, you have come at last: but stay, I owe you a scolding, signor mio!"

"'Tis not Oliver," replied the stranger, with a husky, but somewhat sad tone of voice; and he stood before her. Dianora's first impulse was to call for assistance, but the voice of the stranger again arrested her.

"For God's sake, signora, do not summon any one: You have nothing to fear from me—indeed you have not."

"Giosué, is it only you?" said the young lady, with a tone of undisguised reproach and vexation. There was a pause.

The unwelcome visitor was a young man about six-and-twenty, whose dress announced his occupation and rank in life to be somewhat dubious; but his air, though constrained in the presence of Dianora, had a dash of gallant and graceful recklessness in it. He wore the brigand garb, which had then become a kind of uniform adopted by all desperadoes; he had a carbine in his hand, and a knife and four long iron pistols were stuck in a yellow silk sash. A loose velvet jacket, knee-breeches, and gaiters crossed with red leather straps, displayed to advantage his fine athletic figure, and round his open neck hung a little bag, containing a charm, which he supposed rendered him bullet-proof. A large, shapeless, and battered Calabrian hat, with a royalist red riband flaunting from it, shaded his face, which was fringed with a black and untrimmed beard, and presented a kind of savage beauty, though squalid through want, and fierce in its expression, being marked with the lines of the worst passions. The young girl regarded him with a glance expressive equally of timidity and pity.

"Dianora—Dianora!" said he, reproachfully, but mildly, "there was a time when you were not wont to pronounce my name in such a tone. Alas! sweet cousin—like myself, its very sound seems changed."

"Poor Giosué!" she began.

"Was not expected here to-night," said he, bitterly "No; you await another. Cattivo! I know it."

He regarded her gloomily, his fierce dark eyes sparkling in the twilight, like those of a basilisk; and she, who but a moment before had been all eagerness for the arrival

of Oliver Lascelles, now mentally implored Heaven that he might not come that night, for something dreadful would certainly ensue.

"Dianora," said the young man, "is it true what they tell me—that you love this stranger?"

"As I never can love thee, Giosué," replied the girl, with timid energy.

"Malediction! Have you forgotten how you once swore your hand should be mine?"

"True, Giosué; but you were not then what you have since become."

"Hear me, false one! I swear by God and his blessed saints, that the hand you promised me shall never be the prize of another. No! *maladetto!* I will slay you, rather!" He laughed bitterly, and spoke in a hoarse tone. "You despise me, Dianora. I am now a penniless outlaw. May our uncle, the hard-hearted bishop, whose miserly cruelty has driven me to despair——"

"O, most ungrateful and unkind, Giosué! say, rather, your own wild and intractable spirit has occasioned your destruction——"

"And the loss of your love, Dianora?"

"Indeed, Giosué, I never could have loved you as—you would wish to be loved; but I have pitied you, wept for you, prayed for you ——"

"Bless you, dear girl," replied the young man, with intense sadness; "you are very good and amiable, but I feel that love for you is making me mad!"

"Now, leave me, Giosué. Should the bishop find you here ——"

"Say, rather, he whom you expect!" he exclaimed, bitterly and jealously. "Ha! false and fickle one! within sound of my whistle are those who, in a moment, would bear you off to yonder mountains, in spite of all opposition, and leave in flames this villa of our dog of an uncle. But no, signora, I must have your love freely, or not at all."

"A moment ago you threatened ——"

"Peace! Attempt not to stir, until you have heard me. This cursed English lieutenant (*ha! malediction!* you see I know him), if he comes hither to-night, may get a reception such as he little expects." He uttered a ferocious laugh, and struck with his hand the weapons which gar-

nished his girdle. They clattered, and the heart of Dianora trembled between fear and indignation, for nothing rouses a young girl's spirit so much as hearing her lover spoken of lightly.

"Cospetto! let this baby-faced *teniente* beware," continued Giosué, "or, by the blessed Trinity! I will put a brace of bullets through his brain."

"Wretch!" exclaimed the trembling Dianora, "begone, lest I spit upon you! O, Giosué! are you indeed become so ruffianly? Have brigandism and outrage hardened you thus?"

He laughed sternly, and said, "You *do* expect him to-night, then?"

"What is that to you?" she replied, pettishly. "Cousin, I will love whom I please."

"You shall not love him."

Dianora, who was now angry in downright earnest, began to sing, and thrum the strings of her mandolin.

"Me non segui il biondo Dio,
Me con Fille unisca amore —"

"Dianora!" exclaimed the young man, in a voice half mournful and half ferocious. "By the memory of other days, I conjure you to hear me! Think how, as children—as orphans—we lived, and played, and grew together—hear me!" His voice grew thick; but the irritated girl continued her song.

"E poi sfoghi il suo rigore
Fato rio, nemico ciel."

"Cruel that thou art; thy wish will never be realised!" he exclaimed, fiercely. Still she continued:—

"Che ti desio non mi tormenta,
O —"

"Maledictions on you! Is it thus you treat me?"

Dianora laughed; he gazed intently upon her, with fierce, glistening eyes; his white lips were compressed with stern resolution, though agitation made them quiver—and that quivering was visible even in the moonlight.

"Dianora," said he, "for this time, I will leave you; but when again we meet—*tremble!* Fury! I am not to be treated like a child!"

"Do not be so passionate, signor cousin. *Madonna mia!* You are quite the *Horazio* of *Matteo Aliman's* novel!"

"Beware," he responded, with a dark and inexplicable scowl, "that your hand—the hand pledged as mine—is not bestowed upon your lover as *Clarinia's* was. Farewell, fickle and cruel *Dianora!* Misfortune and love are turning my brain."

"Say, rather, wine, dice, and debauchery."

"*Diavolessa!*" he exclaimed, in accents of rage, and springing over the terrace, disappeared.

Dianora resumed her guitar, but she could sing no more; her assumed nonchalance quite deserted her. The instrument fell on the floor; and, covering her face with her white hands, she wept bitterly, for *Giosué's* threats and *Oliver's* absence terrified her.

The calm moon looked down on the dark forests and the snaky windings of the river, on whose glassy bosom here and there a red glow marked the watch-fires of the distant French piquets. No one was ascending the mountain side. In the villa, in the valley below, and on the hills around it, the most intense silence prevailed. Eagerly *Dianora* listened. Anon, there rang through the welkin a shrill whistle—the whistle of *Giosué*; a faint cry succeeded; it rose from the river side, and floated tremulously upward through the still air. Another, and another followed; they were cries for succour! Her brain reeled—she sank upon her knees, and raised her hands to heaven—her heart beat wildly—she panted, rather than breathed. "O, God!" thought she, "if *Oliver* encounter the wild comrades of *Giosué*, what have I not to dread?"

Appalled by her own vivid and fearful thoughts, she sat, as if spell-bound, listening for other sounds, in an agony of suspense; but none other arose from the dark wooded dell than the murmur of the river, as its waters rolled on their way to the ocean.

"Joy—joy—he comes at last!" she exclaimed, as the hoofs of a galloping horse rang on the narrow and rocky pathway, which wound between thickets of orange and citron-trees, up the mountain side. "Dear and blessed lady of *Burello*, how I thank thee that he came not sooner! Three paters and three aves will I say. I see him now; 'tis he! How bravely he reins up his roan

English horse, with its high head and flowing mane ! There is the dark cloak, and the little cap, beneath which his brown hair curls so crisply. Oh, well should I know him among a thousand !”

With all the frankness and ardour of an Italian girl, she rushed upon the terrace, and, waving her hand over the balustrade, said playfully, “You have come at last, signor mio. Fi ! I owe you a severe lecture ; approach, and receive it penitently.”

At that moment, the horseman rode close to the wall of the terrace, and threw an arm around her. Overcome by her recent agitation, Dianora sank upon his breast, murmuring, in tender accents, “Oliver—dear Oliver.”

“The curses of the whole calendar upon thee and Oliver too ! Ha ! you greet not *him* contemptuously with an old scrap of Metastasio. Burning hell ! traitress, I recall your biting taunts, and will revenge me, even as Horazio did. Lo ! the hand you pledged unto me shall yet be mine.”

A smothered cry burst from Dianora. Instead of the handsome and flushed face of Oliver Lascelles, a livid and unearthly visage, distorted by the most vindictive passions, was close to her cheek ; two ferocious eyes glared upon her, and the strong arm of Giosué was around her.

“Never again wilt thou scorn a lover, Dianora Montecino, and dear will *that* taunt cost thee which dictates my revenge.”

His long, keen acciario gleamed in the moonlight, as he grasped her beautiful hand with the grasp of a tiger—instantly the sharp knife descended upon the slender wrist !

* * * * *

Let me throw a veil over the horrors that ensued.

The French sentinels on the windings of the lonely river, the wolf in the distant woods, and the eagle on the rocks of Battaglia, must have been alike startled by the agonizing shrieks of Dianora. Fearful they were, but of short duration. A moan succeeded—a moan of terrible import. Then rang the hoofs of a horse, as if spurred madly down the steep roadway. A turn of the dell hid the wild horseman, and then all became still.

Her right hand severed at the wrist, her nose cut off, and her face scamed with the most frightful gashes,

ADVENTURES OF AN AIDE-DE-CAMP.

ANORA was found by the alarmed household of the bishop, stretched on the marble terrace, bleeding and senseless—mutilated—dying. She was borne away; convulsions succeeded, and that night the unhappy Dianora died.

She expired in the arms of the venerable bishop, whose grief and horror rendered him almost distracted.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE MONASTERY.

To return to Scylla. The hour of parade passed; Lascelles had not yet returned, and I could no longer withstand my anxiety for his safety. Accompanied by my intelligent countryman Gask, a bugler, and twenty soldiers, in light marching order, each with sixty rounds of ammunition, I departed in the direction of Fiumara, on the almost hopeless errand of endeavouring to discover him. I now reproached myself bitterly, and really thought I had been much to blame in not restricting my rash friend, even at the chance of a quarrel; it could not have been of long duration.

Leaving Scylla as quietly as possible, we marched towards Fiumara, by the most lonely and unfrequented route, through gorges and thickets, expecting every instant to hear the musket of our advanced file discharged, as a signal that a patrol of French cavalry, or some such interruption, was in sight.

It was a beautiful morning; the rays of the bright sun streamed aslant between the peaks of Mylæ, and the white dewy vapour curled from the dells, like a gauze screen, mellowing the dark green of the pine-thickets, and the blue of the gleaming ocean, which shone at times between the openings of the high and broken shore. The morning hymn to the Virgin, and the tolling of the matin-bell, floated through the still air, from the dark old walls of St. Battaglia, a monastery perched on a rock, by the base of which the pathway wound. On we hurried, and soon Fiumara, its houses shining in the sun, the red

smoky fires of the French camp, and their chain of out-piquets near the river, appeared before us.

At the bottom of the hill, on which the villa of Montecino was situated, just as we were striking into the narrow path that wound up its wooded side, our advanced file (who was about fifty paces in front), halted, and waved his hand.

"Keep together, men! fix bayonets!—look to your priming—forward!" I exclaimed, and we rushed towards him. There was no immediate cause for alarm; but on a level spot of green sward, we discovered sufficient evidence that some deed of violence and atrocity had been perpetrated, and I trembled for my poor friend Oliver! On the grass, lay his gilded gorget, with its white silk riband rent in two; near it lay a buff military glove, covered with blood; a little further on, we found his riding-switch, with his crest graven on its gold embossed head. All around, the trampled state of the grass, the marks of feet (some of which had evidently been shoeless), the deep indents of horse-hoofs, and, worst of all, a pool of coagulated blood on the pathway, led us to anticipate some terrible catastrophe. Loud and deep were the threats and execrations of the soldiers.

At an accelerated pace, we pushed up the hill towards the house of Montecino, passing on our left the mouldering ruins of a castelletto, or little fortalice, the broken ramparts of which were almost hidden under heavy masses of dark-green ivy and luxuriant weeds.

Entering the bishop's disordered mansion without ceremony, I halted the soldiers in the vestibule, and desired a servant, who appeared, to conduct me to her master. The woman vouchsafed me no other reply than a motion to follow her: she was very pale, and her eyes were red from recent weeping. Opening a door, she ushered me into a little darkened oratory, where, on a bier before the altar, surrounded by tapers, shedding "a dim, religious light," lay the sad remains of the hapless Dianora. They were covered with a white shroud, and so completely, that I beheld not the frightful ravages committed by the knife of the assassin. Beside the body—his white vestments soiled with blood, his thin grey hairs dishevelled, his aspect wild and haggard—knelt Pietro Montecino, the aged bishop of Nicastro, his attenuated hands clasped, and

holding a crucifix, on which, at times, he bowed down his reverend head. His wonted spiritual resignation, priestly dignity, and stateliness of aspect were gone; his spirit was crushed and broken. How changed was his whole appearance since the day when, with Bianca, I stood before the altar in the church of his bishopric!

"O, Dianora! my daughter—my child!" he exclaimed, in accents of the deepest grief: "O Madonna, have mercy upon me! Holy Trinity, have mercy upon me! Dianora, my blessed one! Saint Eufemio, pray for her! Saint Magdalene, pray for her! Sweet lady of Burello!—beatified Rosalia!—thrice-blessed lady of Loretto, mother of mercy! hear me, and pray for her!" Heavy sobs succeeded.

The touching tones of his voice, and the passionate fervour of his devout appeals, deeply moved me. So intense was his sorrow, that it almost warranted the suspicion of a nearer relationship to Dianora than his vows and character as a Catholic churchman permitted; but no such ungenerous thought occurred to me then: my heart felt only the deepest and most sincere compassion for the bereaved old man. He was so besotted with woe, that I saw it was next to impossible to obtain from him the least intelligence or advice; and, withdrawing softly, I left the villa immediately.

When descending the hill towards the spot where we had found the relics of our missing comrade, we met a peasant, who, with a long ox-goad, was urging a pair of lazy buffaloes towards Scylla. I desired my soldiers to bring him before me, in the desperate hope of obtaining some information concerning poor Lascelles; and, strange to say, we could not have had a luckier rencontre, or better intelligencer.

"Hollo, Signor Campagnuolo!" said I to the cattle-driver, "from whence have you come this morning—Fiumara, eh?"

"No, Signor."

"Where, then?"

From the monastery of Battaglia, down the mountains yonder," he answered somewhat reservedly; and, endeavouring to pass, he added, "a holy day to you, Signor."

"Any movement taking place among the French lately? Are any of their patrols out?"

"I have not heard, excellency; but a fugitive, chased by a party of them, took refuge at the monastery this morning, and is said to have confessed to the Padre Abate a horrible crime."

"Ha! and is he now in the sanctuary?" I demanded, eagerly.

"Prostrate on the steps of the altar; his penitence is great. Madonna, intercede for him!"

"Thanks," said I, permitting the uneasy rustic to pass on his way. "Advance, soldiers—trail arms—forward, double quick! We have got on the right scent at last, perhaps; and there is not a moment to be lost."

With right goodwill the soldiers moved forward towards the monastery, their arms glancing and pouches clanking as they rushed down the steep hill-side. The place of our destination, a confused mass of irregular buildings, stood near the river before mentioned, about a mile distant. It was a monastery of great antiquity; a high wall of grey stone girdled it round, and above that rose its campanile, a square tower, surmounted by a flat tiled roof. From the outer wall, the rocks on which the edifice was perched sloped precipitously down on all sides, especially towards the south, where they descended in one unbroken line to the deep, dark waters of the still but rapid stream, which wound through a chasm below.

As we began to ascend the steep and devious path cut in the hard volcanic rock, and leading directly to the monastery, we saw the monks appearing and disappearing like black crows on their high outer wall, and the arched gateway was hurriedly closed: the fathers were evidently in a state of consternation, and making all fast, fearing that we might disregard the immunities of the holy sanctuary. All the friars had vanished by the time we reached the iron-studded door in the outer wall, over which the evergreen ivy and long rank grass were waving in profusion.

We knocked loudly. No answer was given.

"Sound!" said I to the bugle-boy; and a loud blast from his instrument made the old walls, the echoing chapel, the bosky woods, and splintered rocks ring far and near. Still the summons was unheeded, and the impatient soldiers thundered at the gateway with the butts of their

muskets. The reverend fathers no doubt suspected our purpose.

"What want ye?" said an old vinegar-visaged friar, appearing on the top of the wall, which he had surmounted by the assistance of a ladder.

"Are you all asleep within there?" I answered, angrily. "We want a fugitive, to whom you have given refuge. Call you this civility, padre? and to us whose swords are drawn in the cause of your country?"

"Beware, Signori Inglesi! dare you violate the rights of the blessed sanctuary?"

"You will soon learn whether we will not, you old scarecrow!" I replied, with increased impatience. "Aprite la porta, Signor Canonico, or by Heaven! we will beat it down in a twinkling!"

"Patience, capitano—patience, until I confer with the reverend Superior."

"Be quick, then! We must see instantly this rascal who has obtained sanctuary. The enemy are so near, that we have not a moment to lose."

The monk disappeared. I directed Gask, with six soldiers, to watch the walls, and capture or wound any man attempting to escape; but not to kill, if possible. I was most anxious to learn with certainty the fate of Lascelles: whether he had been assassinated, or was lying perishing and mutilated in some solitary place, or had been delivered up to the French. Indeed, I should have been relieved from a load of anxiety, and felt overjoyed to learn that his fate was only the last. Gask was as well aware as I how jealous the continental monks were of the ancient right of sanctuary, and he knew that they would rather favour the escape of the vilest criminal than deliver him up to offended justice. Of their obstinacy in this respect, I know of several instances: one I will mention in particular. It occurred at Malta:—

A soldier of ours, when passing one day through a street of Valetta, was run against and thrown down by a provoking brute of a pig. Exasperated at having his gay uniform soiled by the dusty street, he gave the grunting porker a hearty kick; upon which, the villanous macellajo, to whom it belonged, drew his poniard and stabbed him to the heart. The poor soldier fell dead on the pavement; the murderer fled to the great church of St. John, and obtained sanc-

tuary. Respecting the popular prejudices of the Maltese (who regard with the greatest veneration that sacred edifice, which contains the sepulchres of innumerable brave knights of the Isle), the general commanding permitted the hot-blooded ruffian to remain some time in sanctuary, before he applied to the bishop for the exertion of his authority to have him delivered up to the civil magistrates. The prelate delayed, equivocated; and the reverend fathers, foreseeing the violation of their famous place of refuge, facilitated the escape of the assassin, and so defeated the ends of justice.

I was determined that the priests of St. Battaglia should not cheat me so in this affair; and, after desiring Gask with his party to keep on the alert, I was about to have the door blown to pieces by a volley of musketry, when the bars were withdrawn, and it slowly revolved on its creaking hinges. The soldiers were about to rush in; but the sight they beheld arrested them: all paused, mute, and turned inquiringly to me for instructions.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SANCTUARY VIOLATED.

THE portal of the edifice slowly unfolded, disclosing the whole array of priests, who, clad in their floating vestments, advanced, chanting, from the oratory, with tapers burning, censers smoking, and two emblazoned banners waving, one of white silk, bearing a large crimson cross, surmounted by the sacred charge of St. Peter—the keys of heaven; the other, the symbolical banner of St. Battaglia, surrounded by all the imaginary odour and glory of sanctity. The spectacle was very imposing: the tapers of scented wax, and the silver censers, filled with lavender flowers, diffused through the air a fragrant perfume; while the pale, curling smoke that encircled the gilded crosses and elevated images, rendered—

“ — Indistinct the pageant proud,
As fancy forms of midnight cloud,
When flings the moon upon her shroud
A wavering tinge of flame.”

The misty vapour, the flickering lights, and the flowing garments of the fathers ; the dark walls of the old cloisters, which rang to the solemn and sonorous chant of twenty male voices ; the distant organ swelling aloud, and then dying away in the hollow recesses of the arched oratory, together produced a striking effect. The abbot, an aged priest of venerable aspect, with a beard white as the new-fallen snow (then an unusual appendage to a canon's chin), appeared at their head. They halted beneath the ivy-crowned archway ; the chant ceased, the soldiers drew back, and all were silent : save the magnificent strains of the organ, reverberating in the vaulted chapel, and the rustle of the consecrated standards, all was still. The abbot, who no doubt expected that this religious display would impress us with a feeling of awe, then addressed me—

"Your purpose, signor?" he asked, mildly, but firmly.

"Reverend abate," I responded, lowering my sword respectfully, "I demand the person of a vile assassin, whom I have learned, from unquestionable authority, you have concealed within these walls!"

"He whom you seek is under the protection of God. Know, signor, that he who puts forth a hand in anger against one who seeketh and findeth sanctuary in the church, is guilty of the most atrocious sacrilege!"

"On my own head be the guilt of the sacrilege, Padre Abate. Excuse us: the French are in your immediate vicinity, and we run the imminent risk of being all taken prisoners. One of our comrades, a young officer of distinction, is missing ; and a frightful assassination has been committed at the villa Montecino: we have every reason to believe that your favoured fugitive is implicated in both these mysterious occurrences. I cannot parley with you, reverend signor: I demand an interview with the criminal ; and, if he is not instantly brought forth, I have to acquaint you that I will search the monastery by force ; and, if need be, drag him from the very altar at the point of the bayonet!"

Ere the indignant abbot could reply—

"Darest thou, abominable heretic as thou art, violate the house of God?" cried a tall, fierce-looking, and fanatical monk, rushing forward, with flushed cheeks

and kindling eyes, and holding aloft a ponderous ebony crucifix. "Pause, lest the thunders of offended Heaven be hurled upon ye; pause, lest the vials of wrath——"

"Pshaw!" I exclaimed, impatiently; "we may parley here till sunset. Soldiers, forward to the chapel; there you will doubtless discover the rogue." My followers rushed past: a volley of execrations burst from the padri, and I was assailed with cries of "paganico infame! malandrino!—infidel! damnable heretic!" and a thousand other injurious and ridiculous epithets. I heeded them not; but, at the head of my party, burst into the chapel of the monastery. I had augured rightly: *there* the fugitive was discovered.

Pale as death, ghastly and bloody from a sword-wound on the head, a savage-looking fellow was dragged by force from the foot of the great gilt crucifix on the altar, to the rail of which he clung for a moment with convulsive energy. The soldiers brought him before me, and, by their fixed bayonets, kept back the exasperated priests, who continued to pour forth upon us a ceaseless torrent of invectives and maledictions, which we regarded no more than the wind.

"Are you the unhappy man who is guilty of murder?" said I. He replied only by a wild and unmeaning stare.

"Unhappy wretch! your name?"

"Giosué of Montecino," said he, suddenly and fiercely. I trembled for poor Oliver, on remembering the name of his rival.

"Villain! what fiend tempted you to slay your unhappy cousin?"

He started, as if stung by a serpent.

"She is dead, then," he said, in a hoarse and almost inarticulate voice, while his head drooped upon his heaving breast. Suddenly uttering a howl like a wild beast, he broke away from the soldiers, escaping their levelled bayonets, and finding the gate secured, scrambled up the rugged outer wall like a polecat; there balancing himself, he turned, and regarded me with a scornful scowl,—he burst into a bitter and hysterical laugh. The soldiers rushed towards him, and one fired, but I threw up his firelock, and the ball passed close to the head of the assassin, who never winced. Escape was now impossible: on one side of him bristled twenty bayonets; on the other

was a tremendous precipice, with a deep river flowing at its base several hundred feet below. The slightest dizziness might have been fatal to him. But folding his arms, he uttered a laugh of defiance, and called upon us to fire. I was strongly tempted to put his talisman to the proof, but restrained my exasperated soldiers.

"Wretch!" said I, "know you ought of a British officer, who has been missing since last night?"

"Yes," he replied, with a sardonic grin, shaking his clenched right hand aloft with savage exultation. "These are the fingers that fastened on his throat with a tiger's clutch."

"You slew him!" I cried, and drew a pistol from my sash.

"I did not—ha! and yet I did."

"How, villain?" He laughed scornfully again.

"Hear me, Giosué Montecino," said I: "you see this pistol? I might, in one moment, deprive you of existence——"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the assassin.

"Yet I will spare your life, if you will tell me the fate of my comrade."

"My life? Bagatella! ho! ho! I want it not. Fools—dolts that ye are! think ye that I am afraid to die? Here is my breast: a thousand bullets were welcome—straight to the heart—fire!" and he smote his bosom as he spoke. There was something almost noble in his aspect at that moment, notwithstanding its wildness and repulsiveness.

"Hear me, fellow: the Lieutenant Lascelles——"

"Ha!" he ground his teeth madly. "Curses hurl him to that perdition into which he has hurried me! At this moment, he feels in the body some of those agonies I endure in the spirit. O Dianora!—thou, whose very shadow I worshipped,—I, who loved the very ground you trod upon!" The inexplicable ruffian sobbed heavily, yet his blood-shot eyes were never moistened by a tear. "O Dianora!" he continued, in a voice, which, though husky, yet expressed the most intense pathos; "who was the fiend that nerved me to destroy thee, and so barbarously? Who, but this accursed Englishman? Believe me, signor, I had not the least intention of slaying her last night. O no! none—none." He wrung his hands wildly. "What

could be further from my thoughts? Disguised as her lover—as this Oliver—I intended to have carried her off, but her endearing accents, addressed as to him, fell like scorching fire upon my heart. I could restrain my demoniac feelings no longer. O, horror! Yet I have done nothing that I would not commit again, rather than behold her in the arms of—of—Maladetto!—his name is poison to my lips!”

“Madman! come down from the wall.”

“Would you learn the fate of your friend?” he asked, exultingly.

“Had I a mountain of gold to give you——”

“Gold?—fool!—what is gold to me? Listen: waylaid by my companions last night, the dog you call your comrade was dashed from his horse by their clubs. He fought bravely, and with his sabre laid open my head: my own blood blinded me. Ha! a moment, and my hand was on his throat—my acciaro at his breast—yet I spared him.”

“Heaven will reward you——”

“Ha! ha! A sudden death suited not my purpose or my hate. Slow, consuming, diabolical, mental tortures were what I wanted: and what think you we did?” I was breathless; I could not ask, but Giosué continued—

“Bound with cords, he was borne to a ruined vault among the lonely mountains yonder; there, amid stinging adders, hissing vipers, bloated toads, and voracious pole-cats, we flung him down, tied hand and foot, stunned and bleeding. Then closing the aperture, we piled up earth, and stones, and rocks against it. There let him perish—unseen, unknown, unheard. May never an ave be said over his bones, and may a curse blight, haunt, and blast, to all futurity, the spot where they lie!” He paused for a moment and then continued more slowly and energetically—

“To laugh to scorn the terror of death was the glory of the Greek and the Roman; and I will show thee, Signor Inglese, that Giosué of Montecino can despise it as nobly as his classic fathers may have done in the days of old.” He raised aloft a long bright poniard, which he suddenly drew forth from his sleeve.

“Madman! desperado!” I exclaimed, “hold, for the sake of mercy! A word—a word—I will give you a

thousand ducats—life—all—anything! but say where you have imprisoned my friend?—for Heaven's sake, say!"

"Never!" said he, with a triumphant scowl; "*never!* let him perish with myself. Love for Dianora led me to destroy her, and love for her still, teaches me that to survive would be the foulest and basest cowardice!"

He struck the stiletto to his heart, and fell dead at my feet.

I was horror-stricken: not by the suicide of the assassin, but by the revelation he had just made. Of its truth, I could not entertain a doubt. The situation of the unfortunate Lascelles, pinioned, wounded, and entombed alive, to endure all the protracted agonies of death by starvation, rushed vividly upon my mind, and overwhelmed me with rage and mortification. I explained to my soldiers the terrible confession of the fierce Giosué, and their emotions were not much short of my own. We endured tantalization in its bitterest sense. What would I not have given that the convulsed corpse of the vindictive Montecino were yet endued with life. But, alas! the ruffian had perished in his villany, with the important secret undisclosed, and the horrible fate of my friend could not be averted.

And Giosué, wretch as he was, I pitied him. His had been the burning love, and his the deadly hatred of his country—

"The cold in clime, or cold in blood,
Their love, it scarce deserves a name;
But *his* was like the lava's flood,
That boils in Etna's breast of flame."

Slowly and dejectedly we quitted the monastery, as the sun was setting behind the hills of Sicily; and marching in silence towards Scylla, we reached a third time the place where Oliver's glove and gorget had been found. There we made an involuntary halt, and gazed around us with the keenest scrutiny, in the hope of discovering some clue to the place of his immurement. My brave party seemed very unwilling to return to Scylla without making another effort to rescue the victim of Montecino. Innumerable were the ideas suggested and plans proposed, but none of them seemed worthy of attention, save one of Serjeant Gask's.

"The rascal mentioned a ruined vault among the hills," said he; "now what think you, Captain Dundas, of searching the ruins on the mountain yonder? And, by my faith, sir, the footmarks and traces of blood lead off in that direction. See! the lower branches of the shrubs are broken, the withered leaves of the last year are trodden down, and bloody tracks are on the grass."

"The serjeant is right, sir," muttered the soldiers, pleased with his acuteness.

"Move on, then; forward, to the old castle: any active occupation is preferable to this horrid state of idle suspense."

A quarter of an hour's rapid marching brought us to the castelletto, a little tower in a state of great dilapidation, covered with masses of bronze-like ivy, and the beautiful wild flowers of fruitful Italy. A large owl flew from one of the shattered openings, and, with a shrill scream, soared on its heavy wings through the evening sky. The woods and hills around us were growing dark; the place was still as the grave—the ivy-leaves rustling tremulously on the rugged masonry of the ruin, and a rivulet tinkling through a fissure of a neighbouring rock, were the only sounds we heard. Solemn pines towered around it on every hand, and the aspect of the landscape was peculiarly desolate and gloomy. A musket was fired as a signal, and, with a thousand reverberations, the wooded hills gave back the echo. With heads bent to the ground, we listened intently; but there was no response, and we looked blankly in each other's faces.

"This cannot be the place," said I, in a tone of sadness, about to move unwillingly away.

"Stay, sir—look here, Captain Dundas," cried Gask; "here is blood on the grass, and, sure as I live, stones freshly heaped up there!"

"Right—by Jove! Gask, you are an acute fellow. Pile your firelocks, lads, and clear away this heap of rubbish."

Flushed with hope, the soldiers attacked the pile of stones indicated by the serjeant; there were bushes, earth, and fragments of ruined masonry, all evidently but recently piled up against the base of the tower. Rapidly they rolled down the heavy blocks, and toiled so strenuously, that in three minutes the whole heap was

cleared away, and a little arched aperture disclosed. An exclamation of joy and hope burst from the whole party; we had found the place. Gask and the little bugler descended into the vault—a dark, damp, and hideous hole, under the ruins. A faint moan drew them cautiously to a corner, and there they found the object of all our search and anxiety—Oliver Lascelles, benumbed by cold, and his limbs swollen almost to bursting by the tight cordage which confined them. He was speechless, and half-stified by the noxious vapours of the dungeon: had we been half an hour later, he must have expired. When we drew him forth, he was so pale, haggard, and death-like, that his aspect shocked me; but the pure fresh breeze of the balmy evening revived him, and he recovered rapidly. He could not address us at first; but his looks of thankfulness, joy, and recognition were most expressive. The soldiers were merry and happy, every face beamed with gladness; even Gask's usually grave and melancholy visage was brightened by a smile.

We had little time for explanation; we were in a dangerous vicinity, from which it was necessary to retire without a moment's delay. Oliver was quite enfeebled; but, supported on the serjeant's arm and mine, he contrived to walk, though slowly, and we set out immediately for the castle of Scylla.

Gask afterwards told me, that in the vault "he had touched something that made his flesh creep." It was a small and delicate female hand. I never mentioned the circumstance to Oliver, who was long in recovering from the effects of his perilous love adventure. But I had no doubt the dead hand was poor Dianora's; the *forfeited* hand, which in cruel mockery that incarnate demon Giosué had thrown beside her lover.

In the bustle of succeeding and more important events, the interest we took in Lascelles' affair gradually subsided. But it was long ere he forgot the fate of Dianora, and the horrible death, which, by a lucky combination of incidents, he had so narrowly escaped; and longer still ere he recovered his wonted buoyancy of spirit and lightness of heart.

CHAPTER LXL

UNEXPECTED PERILS.

THE near approach of the enemy made it apparent that the town of Scylla would soon be destroyed by the shot and shell their artillery would pour upon it; and that the Free Corps, who occupied its half-ruined streets, would be sacrificed, without being of service to the garrison in the castle; I therefore telegraphed to the *Electra* to send off a boat, as I wished to consult with her commander about the transmission of those troops to Messina.

A strong breeze had been blowing from the south-west all day, and the sea ran with such fury through the Straits, that no boat could come off until after sunset, when there was a lull. Immediately, on being informed that a boat had arrived at the sea staircase, I buckled on my sabre, threw my cloak round me, and hurried off, intending to return before the ever-anxious Bianca had discovered my absence. How vain were my anticipations!

The long *fetch* of the sea running from Syracuse rolled the breakers with great fury on the castle rock, and the boat was tossed about like a cork among the foaming surf that seethed and hissed around us. As the oars dipped in the water and she shot away, I seated myself in the stern-sheets, beside the little middy who held the tiller-ropes. The frigate lay nearly a mile to the southward, and there was such a tremendous current against us, that the six oarsmen, though straining every nerve and sinew, found it impossible to make head against it.

"I wish we may make the frigate to-night, sir," said the midshipman, looking anxiously at the clouds; "there's a squall coming from the south-south-east, and these Straits are an awkward place to be caught by one. What do you think, Tom Taut?"

"Think, sir? why that we'll have a dirty night," replied the sailor whom he addressed; a grim, brown, and brawny tar. "When I sailed in the *Polly Thomas*, 74, we had just such a night as this off Scylla, and I won't be in a hurry forgetting it!"

It was now past sunset, in the month of February, and

the darkness of the lowering sky increased rapidly. Through the thin mist floating over the surface of the water, the frigate loomed large ; but when the rising wind cleared it away, we found the distance increasing between us : the strong current was carrying us, at the rate of five knots an hour, towards the terrible rock we had just left, which rose from the water like a black gigantic tower, and seemed ever to be close by, frowning its terrors upon us. Dense banks of vapour soon shrouded the land and hid the frigate ; it grew so dark, that we knew not which way to steer. The seamen still continued to pull fruitlessly ; for we made so much sternway, that I expected to find the frail craft momentarily stranded on the rocky beach.

" We shall never reach the frigate to-night, unless she fills, and makes a stretch towards us," said the midgy. " This current will not change till daylight, and the Lord knows when the wind will chop about. It has been blowing from Syracuse ever since the poor little *Delight* was driven on the rocks yonder."

" You cannot fetch Scylla, I suppose ?"

" Lord, no, sir ! we must give it a wide berth ; the breakers will be running against it in mountains, just now. We must put up the helm and run with the wind and tide, to avoid swamping ; and if we escape being sucked into Charybdis on the westward, or beached under the cliffs of Palmi to the northward, we may consider ourselves lucky dogs."

" But we may be thrown upon a part of the coast occupied by the enemy."

" Better that than go to old Davy, sir," said the grey-haired bow-oarsman, " as I nearly did when the *Polly Femus*, 74, came through these same Straits of Messina."

" When ?" said I ;—" lately ?"

" Lord love you, no sir—why 'twas in the year one."

" One !"

" That is, 1801. We were standing for Malta, with a stiff breeze from the nor'-east. The *Polly Femus* was close-hauled on the starboard tack——"

" D—n the *Polyphemus*," cried the midshipman, testily, as he put the helm up ; " take in your loose gaff, Tom ; if we are not picked up by the *Amphion*, your tuns

will be changed before morning. Hosto keeps a good look-out."

"He was made a sailor of in the *Polly*—whew! beg pardon sir," said the old fellow, who could not resist making another allusion to his old ship.

"Faith! Captain Dundas," said the middy, "it is so dark, that I have not the slightest notion of our whereabouts."

"Yonder's a spark, away to windward, sir," said old Tom. "The *Electra* cannot be less than somewhere about two miles off—a few fathoms, more or less."

At that moment, the frigate fired a gun; the red flash gleamed through the gloom, and after a lapse, the report was borne past us on the night wind. A blue light was next burned; it shone like a distant star above the black and tumbling sea, then expired; and so did all our hopes of reaching the ship—the sound of her gun having informed us that we had been swept by the current far to the north of the Lanterna of Messina, which was rapidly being lost amid the murky vapour.

"Keep a good look-out there forward," cried the middy; "if we miss the *Amphion*, we may all go to the bottom, or be under weigh for a French prison by this time to-morrow."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the sailor through his hand, while, bending forward, he strove to pierce the gloom ahead.

"Give way, men—cheerily now."

The rowers stretched back over the thwarts, till their oars bent like willow wands, and as the strong current was with us now, we flew through the foaming water with the speed of a race-horse.

"The *Amphion* should be somewhere hereabouts," said the midshipman, as the oarsmen suspended their labours, after a quarter of an hour's pulling; we anxiously scanned the gloomy, watery waste, but could discern no trace of her. Vapour and obscurity involved us on every side, and our minds became a prey to apprehensions, while our blood chilled with the cold atmosphere, and a three hours' seat in an open boat at such a season. The tower of the Lantern had vanished; a single star only was visible, and the inky waves often hid it, as the boat plunged down into the dark trough of the midnight sea.

Suddenly the broad moon showed her silvery disc above the level horizon ; her size seemed immense, and as the thin gauzy clouds rolled away from her shining face, we saw the black waves rising and falling in strong outline between. Her aspect was gloomy and lowering.

"When the moon sets, the current will begin to run northward," said the experienced little mid, "and we shall have a capital chance of being sucked into the Calofaro, or stranded on Punta Secca. Would to God we saw the frigate!"

As he spoke, a large vessel passed across the bright face of that magnificent moon, which shed a long line of silver light across the troubled water, brightening the summits of the waves, as they rose successively from the dark bosom of the sea. The effect was beautiful, as the vessel passed on the rolling surge, and, heaving gracefully, slid away into obscurity.

"A large frigate on the starboard tack," said the midshipman, as she disappeared ; "she is five miles off."

"That's the *Amphion*, your honour," said Tom Taut ; "I know her as well as the old *Polly Femus*."

"Are you sure?" I asked, with anxiety.

"Sure!" replied Tom, energetically, spitting his quid to leeward ; "I know her in a moment, by the rake of her spars. Her mizen top-sail aback—her courses shivering : I know her better than any ship on the station, except the darling old *Polly*. Bill Hoste is creeping along shore, after some of these gun-boats the *Delight* let slip so easily."

"If I judge rightly, we must be somewhere off Palmi."

"Hark!" said the midshipman ; and the roar of billows rolling on the shore confirmed my supposition.

"Breakers ahead!" cried the man at the bow ; and we beheld a long white frothy line, glimmering through the gloom, and above it towered the dark outline of a lofty coast. The current shot us among the surf, which boiled around us, as white as if we were amid the terrors of Charybdis. A little cove, where the waves rolled gently up the sandy slope, invited us to enter ; the boat ran in, and we were immediately in the smooth water of a little harbour, where the dark wild woods overhung the rocks at its entrance, and all around it on every side. Here we

hoped to remain unseen, till daylight revealed our "whereabouts," as the middy had it.

For a time, we kept the oars in the rowlocks, ready to retire on a moment's notice ; but finding that not a sound, save the dashing sea, woke the echoes of that lonely place, I volunteered to land and make a reconnoissance, desiring the midshipman to pull southward along the shore, in case of any alarm, that I might be picked up at some other point. Belting my sabre tighter, I threw aside my cloak, and sprang ashore. On walking a little way forward through the wood, I found the country open, and saw lights at a distance, which I conjectured to be those of Palmi or Seminara, where Regnier had concentrated a strong body of troops.

Straggling forward among a wilderness of prostrate columns and shattered walls, overgrown with creeping plants and foliage (probably the ruins of ancient *Taurianum*), I often stopped, and bent to the ground to listen, but heard only the creaking trees, the gurgle of a lonely rill, seeking its devious path to the sea, or the rustle of withered leaves, swept over the waste by the rising wind. But the roll of a distant drum, and the flash of a cannon, about two miles off, arrested my steps, and made me think of returning : I conjectured it to be the morning gun from the French fort at Palmi. Daylight soon began to brighten the summits of the Apennines, and the waves, as they rolled on each far-off promontory and cape. Having nearly a mile to walk, I began hurriedly to retrace my steps, for the dawn stole rapidly on. As I walked on, the deep boom of a cannonade, and the sharp patter of small arms, made my heart leap with excitement and anxiety, and spurred me in my flight. Breaking through the wood, I rushed breathlessly to the shore—but, alas ! the boat was gone : I saw it pulled seaward, with a speed which the strong flow of the morning current accelerated. In close chase, giving stroke for stroke, while the crew plied their muskets and twenty-four pounder, followed one of those unlucky gun-boats captured by the French : it had been anchored in the same cove, and had discovered our little shallop the moment day broke.

The pursued and the pursuers soon disappeared behind a promontory, and I found myself alone, far behind the enemy's lines, and almost without a chance of escape.

Cursing the zeal which had led me on such a fruitless reconnaissance, I retired into a beech-wood, as the safest place, and lay down in a thicket, to reflect on my position, and form a plan for extrication from it.

CHAPTER LXII.

CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY.—THE TWO GENERALS.

I WAS only twelve miles distant from Scylla ; but, as every approach to it was closely blocked up by Regnier, whose troops covered the whole province from sea to sea, every attempt to reach it would be attended by innumerable dangers and difficulties ; yet, confiding in the loyalty of the Calabrese, and the influence my name had among them, I did not despair of regaining the fortress, by seeking its vicinity through the most retired paths.

Except my sword, spurs, and Hessian boots, I had nothing military about me, as I wore a Calabrian doublet of grey cloth, and a nondescript forage-cap. As I walked forward, the trees became more scattered, and the openness of the ground made the utmost circumspection necessary. A sudden cry of "*Halte ! arrêtez !*" made me pause ; and, within a few paces, I beheld a French vidette—a lancer, in his long scarlet cloak, which flowed from his shoulders over the crupper of his horse, and, like his heavy plume and tricoloured banderole, was dank with dew.

"*Ah, sacre coquin !*" he cried, lowering his lance, and charging me at full speed. "I see you are an Englishman." I sprang behind a tree, and, as he passed me in full career, by a blow of my sabre I hewed the steel head from his lance. At that moment, an officer rode up, and, placing a pistol at my head, commanded me to yield. Resistance was vain, and I surrendered my sabre in the most indescribable sorrow and chagrin,—for thoughts of Bianca, of a long separation and imprisonment, of all my blighted hopes of happiness, honour and promotion, and of the important trust reposed in me, rushed in a flood upon my mind : almost stupified, I was led away by my captor.

A few minutes' walk brought us to the bivouac of a cavalry brigade, which was in all the bustle of preparation for the march, while six trumpeters, blowing "boot and saddle," made the furthest dingles of the forest ring. The horses were all piqueted under trees or within breast-ropes; and the officer informed me that the brigade was that of General Compere, before whom he led me.

Rollled up in a cloak, the general was seated at the foot of a tree: behind him stood his mounted orderly, holding his charger by the bridle. His aide-de-camp and a number of officers lounged round him, smoking cigars, drinking wine from a little barrel, and joking with great hilarity, ere they marched. The ashes of the watch-fires smouldered near, the mist was curling between the branches of the leafless trees, and the rising sun glittered on the bright lance-heads, the gay caps, and accoutrements, of the dashing lancers, who were rapidly unpiqueting their chargers, and forming close column of squadrons, on the skirts of the wood.

"Monsieur le vicomte is welcome as flowers in spring," said the general; "but who is this?—Ah!" he exclaimed, suddenly recognizing me, and raising politely his cocked-nat. "I did not expect to have this pleasure. You are the brave officer I met at Maida?"

I bowed.

"And again behind our lines at Cassano—disguise as a monk?" he added, with a keen glance.

"Thrown upon that coast by shipwreck, I gladly adopted any disguise, until I could escape."

"Our whole army heard of you, and understood you had been employed as a spy by the count of Maida; consequently, Massena was enraged at your escape. Ah! the old Tambour—he is a rough dog! However, monsieur, I do not believe that one who could fight so gallantly at Maida, would stoop to act a dishonourable part."

"Yet, will monsieur be so good as explain," said another officer, "how we find him *here*, without the lines drawn round Scylla, to the garrison of which he says he belongs—and why in the garb of a Calabrian?"

Indignant at the suspicious nature of these queries, and unused to the humiliating situation of a prisoner, I replied briefly and haughtily, relating how I had missed the

boat—a story which none of them seemed to believe. A whisper ran round, and the offensive term “*espion*,” brought the blood rushing to my cheek.

“*Monsieur le général*,” said I, with a sternness of manner which secured their respect, “will, I trust—in memory of that day at Maida—be so generous as to send me, on parole, to Messina, where I may treat about an exchange. By doing so, he will confer a lasting obligation, which the fortune of war may soon put it in my power to repay.”

“I deeply regret that to General Regnier I must refer you—he, alone, can grant your request. As we move instantly on Scylla, you must be transmitted to headquarters without delay, and under escort. Appearances are much against you, but I trust matters will be cleared up. *Chataillion*,” said he to his aide, “help the gentleman to wine and a cigar, while I write a rough outline of this affair to *monsieur le général*.”

Commanding my feelings and features, I drank a glass or two of wine, while the general, taking pen and ink from his *sabretache*, wrote a hasty note to Regnier.

“*Chataillion*,” said he, while folding it, “order a corporal and a file of lances.”

The vicomte went up to the first regiment of the brigade, and returned with the escort.

“In the charge of these soldiers, you must be sent to Seminara, where I trust your parole will be accepted, in consequence of this note; though *monsieur le général* and *monseigneur le maréchal*, are far from being well disposed towards you, especially for the last affair with the *voltigeurs* of the 23rd. Ah! Regnier’s son Philip was shot at Bagnara—poor boy! Adieu! May we meet under more agreeable circumstances,” and giving the letter to the corporal, Compere sprang into his saddle, and left me. His aide-de-camp, the Vicomte de *Chataillion*, seeing how deeply I was cast down, expressed regret at having been my capturer. “But *monsieur* will perceive,” said he, with a most insinuating smile, “that I was only doing my duty. You cannot travel on foot with a mounted escort—it would be dishonourable, and as I have a spare horse, you are welcome to it; on reaching Seminara, or even the frontiers, you can return it with the corporal. Adieu!” And we parted.

The frontier! distraction! I could scarcely thank the young Frenchman; but memory yet recalls his gallant presence and commanding features—one of the true old noblesse. How different he was from Pepe, Regnier, Massena, and many others, whom the madness and crimes of the Revolution had raised to place and power, from the dregs of the French people.

With a little ostentation, the lancers loaded their pistols before me, and in five minutes I was *en route* for Seminara, with a file on each side, and the corporal riding behind. I often looked back; Compere's brigade were riding in sections towards the hills, with all their lance-heads and bright accoutrements glittering in the sun, while the fanfare of the trumpets, the clash of the cymbals, and the roll of the kettledrums, rang in the woods of Palmi. They were moving towards Scylla, and my heart swelled when I thought of my helplessness, and of poor Bianca; the hope of Regnier accepting my parole alone sustained me, but that hope was doomed to be cruelly disappointed.

By the way, we passed many ghastly objects, which announced the commencement of that savage war of extermination, which General Manhes afterwards prosecuted in the Calabrias. Many armed peasantry had been shot, like beasts of prey, wherever the French fell in with them, and their bodies hung on the trees we passed under, while their grisly heads were stuck on poles by the roadside. Some were in iron cages, and, reduced to bare skulls, grinned through the rusty ribs like spectres through barred helmets; while the birds of prey, screaming and flapping their wings over them, increased the gloomy effect such objects must necessarily have upon one's spirits.

The morning was balmy and beautiful, the sun hot and bright, the sky cloudless, and of the palest azure; light fleecy vapour floated along the distant horizon, where the sea lay gleaming, in green and azure; but never had I a more unpleasant ride than that from Compere's bivouac. I often looked round me, in the desperate hope that a sudden attack of robbers, or loyal peasants, would set me free, though warned by the corporal, that on the least appearance of an attempt at rescue, he would shoot me dead. But Regnier had effectually cleared and scoured the

country, and we passed no living being, save an old Basilian pilgrim, travelling barefooted, perhaps on his way to the Eternal City; and once, in the distance, a solitary bandit on the look-out, perched on the summit of a rock, like a lonely heron. The bells of the mountain goats, the hum of the bee, or the flap of the wild bird's wing, and the dull tramp of our horses on the grassy way, alone broke the silence. My escort were solemn and taciturn Poles, who never addressed a word either to me or to each other; so my gloomy cogitations were uninterrupted till we entered Seminara, when the scene changed.

The town was crowded with soldiers, and all the populace had fled; cavalry, infantry, artillery, sappers, voltigeurs, and military artisans, thronged on every hand; shirts and belts were drying at every window, and the air was thickened by pipe-clay and tobacco-smoke, while the sound of drums, bugles, and trumpets, mingled with shouts and laughter, rang through the whole place—noise and uproar reigning on all sides. The great Greek abbey and cathedral were littered with straw, for cavalry horses; the principal street was blocked up by waggons, caissons, tumbrils, pontoons, mortars, and the whole of that immense battering-train, concentrated for the especial behoof of my brave little band at Scylla, whither it would be conveyed the moment the roads were completed.

A strong guard of grenadiers, stationed before the best house in the town, announced it to be the quarters of the general. They belonged to the 62nd of the French line. In front of the mansion stood thirty pieces of beautiful brass cannon, the same which the French threw into the sea on abandoning Scylla, when, in the year following, the British beleaguered it under Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, 27th regiment. I was ushered by the corporal into the general's presence, and found him just finishing breakfast; he had pushed away his last cup of chocolate, placed his foot on the braciére, and was composing himself to resume reading the *Moniteur*, while his servant, a grenadier, in blue uniform, with rough iron-grey moustaches, cleared the table. On the wall, hung a bombastic bulletin of Napoleon, dated 27th December, 1806:—

“The Neapolitan dynasty has ceased to reign! its existence is incompatible with the repose of Europe, and the

honour of our crown. Soldiers, march, and if they will await your attack, drive into the sea those feeble battalions of *the tyrants of the ocean*—lose no time in making all Italy subject to my arms!"

Probably the *Moniteur* contained some unpleasant account of our brilliant success in other parts of the world, for the temper of the general was soured, and he regarded me with a most vinegar-like aspect, when the corporal rushed me in. I bowed coldly; he answered only by a stern glance, spread his hands behind his coat-tails, and leaned against the mantelpiece.

"Ouf! a prisoner of war," said he, and scanning me at intervals, while reading the letter of Compere.

"Your name and rank?"

"Dundas, captain of the 62nd regiment of the line, and commandant of the castle of Scylla, for his Majesty Ferdinand IV."

"Ouf! the very man we wanted! You were caught on the shore, near Palmi?"

"Yes, when left there by the boat of the *Electra* frigate, and merely meaning to make a reconnoissance (until day-break enabled us to put to sea), I penetrated—"

"A deuced lame story! Bah! you were merely making a reconnoissance at Canne too, I suppose? Ha! ha! well, we will cure you of that propensity, for the future."

"I request to be liberated on my parole."

"A spy on parole! Ouf!"

"Scoundrel!" I exclaimed, losing all temper, "I am a gentleman—a British officer."

"Sacre coquin! men of honour do not prowl in the rear of an enemy's *chaîne de quartiers* in disguise; where is your uniform?"

I gave him a scornful glance, in reply.

"Ouf!" said he, "you came to see our arrangements for capturing your crow's-nest at Scylla. Behold, then, our pontoons, our battering-train, our brigades of infantry and sappers; I trust you will report to monseigneur the prince of Ksling, that they are all ready for instant service."

"Monsieur, I demand my parole."

"If Massena grants a parole, he may, but not so Regnier; you must be sent to the marshal, and I believe he is

most likely to give you a yard or two of stout cord, and a leap from the nearest tree."

"Such conduct would not surprise me in the least," I answered, bitterly: "the savage military government, which dragged the Duc d'Enghien from a neutral territory, and after a mockery of judicial form shot him by torchlight at midnight, and which so barbarously tortured to death a British officer, in the Temple, at Paris, must be capable of any inhumanity. After the ten thousand nameless atrocities by which France, since the days of the Revolution, has disgraced herself among the nations of Europe, no new violation of military honour, of humanity, or the laws of civilized nations, can be a subject of wonder."

"Ah, faquin! I could order you to be hanged in ten minutes."

"A day may yet come when this ruffianly treatment shall be repaid."

"Ouf! monsieur mouchard, Massena will look to that. At Castello di Bivona, you will be embarked on board *La Vigilante*, courier gun-boat, commanded by Antonio Balotte. He is a rough Lucchese, that same Antonio who will string you to the yard-arm, if you prove troublesome. Ouf! if the emperor was of my opinion, his soldiers would not take any prisoners." He grinned savagely, and summoned his orderly.

"Order a corporal and file of soldiers. To them," he continued, addressing the lancer, "you will hand over the prisoner, with this brief despatch, for Marshal Massena, at Cosenza; it states who he is, and the suspicions against him."

Massena! O, how little I had to hope for, if once in the clutches of that savage and apostate Italian, particularly when blackened by all that Regnier's malicious nature might dictate. In half an hour, I was on the march for Castello di Bivona, escorted by a corporal, and file of the 101st, with fixed bayonets. As a deeper degradation, Regnier had ordered me to be handcuffed. Heavens! my blood boils yet at the recollection of that! I would have resisted, but a musket levelled at my head silenced all remonstrance, and I bottled up my wrath, while Corporal Crapaud locked the fetters on me. We marched off, my exasperation increasing as we proceeded, for the escort

seemed determined to consider me in the character of a spy, and consequently treated me with insult and neglect; in vain I told them I was a British officer, and deserved other treatment.

"True, monsieur," replied the corporal, who was a dapper little Gaul, four feet six inches high, "but I am obeying only the orders of the general; and a British officer, or any other officer, who is caught among an enemy's cantonments in disguise, must be considered as a spy, and expect degradation as such. Monsieur will excuse us—we have orders not to converse with prisoners; and the general—ah! *ventre bleu!*—he is a man of iron!"

This coolness, or affectation of contempt or superiority, only increased my annoyance. Although the soldiers conversed with all the loquacity and sung with all the gaiety of Frenchmen, they addressed me no more during the march of more than twenty-five miles. This lasted seven hours, exclusive of halts at Gioja, Rossarno, and several half-deserted villages and shepherds' huts, where they extorted whatever they wanted, at point of the bayonet, and made good their quarters whenever they chose; browbeating the men and caressing the women (if pretty). I often expected a brawl, and perhaps a release; but all hope died away, when, about sunset, we entered Castello di Bivona: my spirit fell in proportion as the plains and snow-capped Apennines grew dark, when the red sun dipped into the Tyrrhene Sea.

There were no French troops in the town; but, anchored close to the shore, lay the French gun-boat *La Vigilante*, mounting a six and a fourteen-pounder, and having thirty-six men—quite sufficient to hold in terror the inhabitants of the little town, who had not forgotten the visit paid them by Regnier's rear-guard. My heart sickened when, from an eminence, I beheld *La Vigilante*, which was to bear me further from liberty and hope; and the most acute anguish took possession of me, when confined for the night and left to my own sad meditations. I understood that I was to be transmitted to the Upper Province with some other prisoners, who were to arrive from Monteleone in the morning, and be conveyed across the Gulf of St. Eufemio by the gun-boat.

I found myself confined for the night in the upper

apartment of a gloomy tower, formed of immense blocks of stone, squared and built by the hands of the Locrians. The chamber was vaulted, damp, and destitute of furniture; but a bundle of straw was thrown in, for my couch, by Corporal Crapaud: he, with the escort, occupied a chamber below, where they caroused and played with dominoes. A turf battery of four twenty-four pounders, facing the seaward, showed that the French had converted this remnant of the ancient Hipponium into a temporary fort: a trench and palisade surrounded it.

A single aperture, a foot square, four feet from the floor, and crossed by an iron bar, admitted the night breeze and the rays of the moon; showing the dark mountains, the blue sky, and the sparkling stars.

Left to solitude, my own thoughts soon became insupportable. "At this time yesternight, I was with Bianca!" To be separated from her for an uncertain time—perhaps for ever, if Regnier's threats were fulfilled by the relentless Massena; to be taken from my important command at a time so critical—when the last stronghold of the British in Calabria was threatened by a desperate siege, on the issue of which the eyes of all Italy and Sicily were turned; the imminent danger and degrading suspicions under which I lay, manacled and imprisoned like a common felon; threatened on the one hand with captivity, on the other with death; and, worst of all, the image of Bianca, overwhelmed with sorrow and horror by the obscurity which enveloped my fate: all combined, tortured me to madness. I was in a state bordering on distraction. Stone walls, iron bars, and steel bayonets: alas! these are formidable barriers to liberty.

Midnight tolled from a distant bell, then all became still: so still, that I heard my heart beating. Deeming me secure, my escort were probably sleeping over their cups and dominoes. I was encouraged to attempt escaping, and endeavoured to rally my thoughts. Though half worn out by our long march over detestable roads—a journey rendered more toilsome by the constrained position of my fettered hands—I became fresh and strong, and gathered courage from the idea. Yonder lay the *Vigilante*, with her latteen sail hanging loose; and the sight of her was an additional spur to exertion: once on board of her, every hope was cut off for ever.

The detested fetters—two oval iron rings secured by a padlock and bar—were first to be disposed of: but how? The manner in which they secured the wrists crippled my strength: the iron bar was a foot long, and though defying my utmost strength to break or bend it, yet ultimately it proved the means of setting me free. The padlock was strong and new: but a happy thought struck me; I forced it between the wide and time-worn joints of the wall until it was wedged fast, as in a vice, then, clasping my hands together, I wrenched round the bar, using it as a lever on the lock, which passed through it; and in an instant the bolt, the wards, the plates which confined them, and all the ironwork of the once formidable little engine, fell at my feet.

"God be thanked! oh, triumph!" burst in a whisper from my lips: my heart expanded, and I could have laughed aloud, while stretching my stiffened hands. But there was no time to be lost: the fall of the broken padlock might have alarmed the escort, and I prepared for instant flight. Thrusting some of the iron pieces under the door bolts, to prevent it being readily opened, I turned to the window, and found, with joy, that there was space enough between the cross-bar and the wall for egress: but the ground was fifteen feet below. With great pain and exertion, I pressed through, and, half suffocated, nearly stuck midway between the rusty bar and stone rybate. At that moment of misery and hope, the corporal thundered at the door; I burst through, fell heavily to the ground, and for a moment was stunned by the fall: but the danger of delay, and the risk of being instantly shot, if retaken, compelled me to be off double-quick. I rushed up the banquette of the gun-battery, cleared the parapet at a bound, and scrambled over the stockade like a squirrel.

"Vilain, hola! halte!" cried Crapaud, firing his musket. The ball whistled through my hair, and next moment I was flying like a deer with the hounds in full chase. I was closely pursued; but, after three narrow escapes from the bullets of my escort, I baffled them, and gained in safety the cork-wood of Bivona.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE ALBERGO.—THE BANDIT'S REVENGE.

SEEKING a thick and gloomy dingle, I flung myself under its shadow to rest; breathless with my recent exertion, the long day's march, and the excitement of the last hour. My plan was soon decided: to approach Scylla, from which I was then nearly thirty miles distant, was my principal object; but many dangerous obstacles were to be encountered and overcome, before I stood in the hall of Ruffo Sciglio. The snow melting among the Apennines had swollen the Metramo and other rivers which I had to pass; the towns, villages, and all the level country swarmed with French troops and Buonapartist sbirri or gendarmes, all closing up towards the point of attack; while the woods and mountains were infested by banditti, the most ferocious and lawless in Europe. To lie concealed in thickets by day, and to travel by night, was the plan I proposed adopting; and anxious to find myself as far as possible from the place of my imprisonment, after a brief rest I set forward on my dubious and difficult journey, thinking more of the joy of embracing Bianca, than the triumph of meeting Regnier in the breach.

Many of the mountains being yet capped with snow, rendered the air cold and chilly; my head was without covering, and I was destitute of every means of defence against either robbers or wolves: the last were numerous in these wilds, and I often heard their cries rising up from the depths of the moonlit forest, through which I toiled southward. So wearying, difficult, and uncertain was the path, that I had only proceeded seven or eight miles when day broke, and found me in an open and desert place near Nicotera. The appearance of a body of the enemy marching down the hills was sufficient to scare me, and, seeking shelter in an orange-wood, I lay concealed in it for hours, not daring to venture forth, although I felt the effects of an appetite sharpened by the keen mountain air. I had heard much of the manna said to be found in the morning on the leaves of the mulberry and other trees in Calabria; but not a drop was to be seen, although I searched anxiously

enough. The day seemed interminably long, and joyfully I hailed eve closing as the sun sank once more behind Sicily, and the long shadows of Nicotera fell across the plain.

Armed with a stout club, torn from a tree, I once more set forward, favoured by the dusk and refreshed by my long halt, though hungry as a hawk.

At the hut of a poor charcoal-burner I received some refreshment, and ascertained the right (or rather safest) path; the honest peasant, on partly learning the circumstances of my escape, shouldered his rifle, stuck a poniard in his girdle, and accompanied me as far as Gioja; where, after showing me from the heights the French watch-fires at Seminara, he left me. I was pleased when he did so, for then only I became convinced that his intentions were honest. While travelling with him unarmed, I was somewhat suspicious of his kindness: but I did him wrong; he was a hardy and loyal Calabrian, and my fears were groundless. Regretting having brought him so far from his hut, I gave him three crowns, nearly all the money in my possession. At first he refused it; but the temptation was too great for the poor peasant, whose only attire was a jacket of rough skin, a pair of tattered breeches, the net which confined his ample masses of hair, and the buff belt sustaining his dagger and powder-horn. Muttering something about his little ones at home, he took the reward, with many bows and protestations, and we parted.

Rejoicing in my progress, I struck into a path up the hills towards Oppido. The utmost circumspection was now necessary, every avenue to Scylla being closely guarded by Regnier's piquets and chain of advanced sentries. About midnight, I lost my way among the woods and defiles. I was drenched by falling into a swampy rice plantation, and severely cut and bruised by the rocks and roots of trees, the night being so dark that I could scarcely see my hand outstretched before me. A sudden storm of rain and wind, which swept down from the hills, completed my discomfiture; and I hailed with joy a light which twinkled at the bottom of a deep and savage dell, seeming, from the eminence on which I stood, like a lantern at the bottom of a pit.

It proved to be an albergo, or lonely mountain-inn

but of the most wretched description. Exhausted and weather-beaten as I was, the many unpleasant stories I had heard of those suspicious places, and the close connection of their owners with the banditti, occurred to me; but this did not discourage me from knocking at the door. Close to it stood a lumbering, old-fashioned, Sicilian carriage, which announced a visitor of some importance; and the moment I knocked, a violent altercation ensued as to whether or not the door should be opened.

"Signor Albergatore," cried a squeaking voice, "open the door at your peril! Open it—and I shall lay the whole affair before his excellency the president of the grand civil court."

The innkeeper uttered a tremendous oath, and opened the door. A blazing fire of billets and sticks roared up the opening which served for a chimney, and filled the whole albergo with a ruddy light. The host, a most forbidding-looking dog, with only one eye, a lip and nose slashed by what appeared to have been a sword-cut, and which revealed all his upper teeth, growled a sullen welcome; evidently nowise pleased with my splashed and miserable appearance. But I was resolved to make good my billet, and drawing close to the fire, took a survey of the company. It consisted of an important little personage, whose face seemed the production of a cross between the rat and weasel; a jovial young fellow, whose jaunty hat and feather, green velvet jacket, and breeches of striped cotton, rosy and impudent face, together with his little mandolin, declared him to be a wandering improvisatore; and an old monk of St. Christiana (the neighbouring town), who lay fast asleep in a corner, with his hands crossed on his ample paunch, his shaven scalp shining like a polished ball in the light of the fire, which made his white hair and beard glisten like silver as they flowed over his coarse brown cassock.

The little personage before mentioned, was Ser Villani, the great notary of St. Eufemio: a more apt plunderer of King Ferdinand's subjects than any robber in Calabria: he was a thorough-paced lawyer, and consequently a knave. Armed with a pass, which for a certain consideration he had obtained from General Regnier, he was on his way from Gierazzo, where he had been collect-

ing information relative to an interminable process. The grand civil court of Palermo was putting every judicial instrument in operation to plunder the rich prince of St. Agata, at the suit of a neighbouring abbey of monks, whose relicario he was bound to keep in repair; he having neglected to enclose the parings of the nails of San Gennaro in a gilt box, these inestimable reliques were lost, and his altezza was deprived of his cross of the saint's order, and became liable to swinging damages. All his notes on this most interesting case, Ser Villani carried in a legal green bag, which he grasped with legal tenacity; and he looked at me from time to time with glances of such distrust and dislike, that I concluded it contained more than mere paper.

Three well-armed and wild-looking peasants were sleeping in a corner, and the host wore a long knife in his girdle. Forbidding as he was in aspect, his wife and daughter were still more so; their clothes exhibited a strange mixture of finery and misery—massive silver pendants and gold rings, chains, rags, and faded brocades; while their feet were shoeless. My suspicions increased, and I found I had got into a lion's den.

"Signore Albergatore," said I, "do you fear banditti, that you were so long in undoing the door?"

"'Twas the Signor Scrivano who raised so many objections," he replied, sulkily.

"Had Master Villani known I was a cavalier of Malta escaping from the French, he might have been a little more hospitable," I replied, to deceive them as to my real character; for I dreaded being given up to Regnier, perhaps for the sake of a reward. "Who occupy the mountains hereabout?"

"Scarolla and Baptistello Varro," replied the host. "But they never visit so poor an albergo as this."

"I hope not," faltered the notary, who turned ghastly pale at the name of Varro; and muttering to himself, he glanced uneasily at us all, with eyes that glittered like those of a monkey. "Ah, when will that loitering scoundrel of a postilion return with a smith, to repair the calesso? Hound! he contrived very opportunely that the wheel should come off close by the albergo; but let him beware; his neck shall pay the forfeit, if worse comes of this."

A quiet laugh spread over the host's face, like sunshine over a field.

"Ser," said the improvisatore, "your postilion is probably only away to the next hill; and when he returns, a score of riflemen will be at his back."

The little notary quaked; and although the cunning minstrel merely spoke in jest, his suppositions were indeed too correct. The secret understanding which existed between the brigands, postilions, and innkeepers of South Italy, was notorious; it has formed the machinery of innumerable tales of fiction. But since the campaign of Manhes, and the close of the war, Italy has been quite regenerated.

The improvisatore received a furious glance from the host, that confirmed my suspicions; but to retire now was almost impossible.

After a miserable supper had been washed down by a caraffa of tart country wine, we drew closer to the smoky fire, and composed ourselves round it for the night. The wife and daughter of the host retired to a kind of loft above; resigning the only bed in the house,—viz., a bag of leaves and a blanket or two, to the priest. The notary nodded over his green bag, and though he started at every sound, pretended to be fast asleep.

Notwithstanding my fatigue, thoughts stole over me and kept me awake; and more than once I saw the dark glassy eye of the host observing me intently from the gloomy corner where he lay on the tiled floor. In short, not to keep the reader any longer behind the curtain, we were in one of those infamous dens which were the resort of the brigands, to whom the keepers conveyed information of all travellers who passed the night with them, stating whether they were armed, or escorted by soldiers or sbirri. The suspicious improvisatore again whispered to me that he had no doubt the notary's postilion was only away to summon his comrades, the banditti. Reflecting that I was unarmed, I felt the utmost anxiety, but retiring might only anticipate matters; the fellows asleep in the corner were well armed, and I saw the hilts of their knives and pistol-butts shining in the light of the fire.

"I am glad we have a cavalier of Malta here to-night," whispered the lad with the guitar. "You may save

us all from Baptistello, if he pays us a visit—all, one excepted; but, signor, you have very much the air of an Englishman."

"I served with the English fleet when it assisted the knights at the siege of Valetta. But I hope the rogues will not carry me off in expectation of a ransom."

"Madonna forbid! But Heaven help poor Villani, if he fall into the clutches of Baptistello!"

"Why so?"

"Signor, it is quite a story!" said he, drawing closer, and lowering his voice. "Baptistello was a soldier of the Cardinal Ruffo, and served in his army when it defeated the French in the battle of Naples, on the happy 5th of June. His father, Baptiste, was a famous bravo and capo-bandito, who infested the mountains above St. Agata, and was the terror of the province from Scylla to La Bianca. He boasted that he had slain a hundred men; and it is said, that in order to rival the frightful Mammone, he once quaffed human blood. He was deemed bullet-proof; a charm, worn round his left wrist, made him invulnerable; and he escaped so often and so narrowly, that he soon thought so himself. His presence inspired terror, and no man dared to travel within twenty miles of his district without a numerous escort. The prince of St. Agata, lord of that territory, alone treated his name with contempt, and daily drove his carriage through the wildest haunt of Baptiste, without attendants.

"One day they met: it was in a lonely valley near the Alece.

"Stand!" cried the gigantic robber, kneeling behind a rock, over which he levelled his rifle. The reins fell from the hands of the driver.

"Villain! fire, if you dare!" cried the prince.

"The robber fired, and his bullet passed through the hat of the prince, who levelling a double-barrelled pistol, shot four balls through the heart of his assailant. Before the arrival of the banditti, who with shouts were rushing down from the mountains, the prince was driving at full gallop through the valley, with the body of Varre lashed to the hind axle-bar, and trailing along the dusty road. Thus he entered Reggio in triumph, like Achilles dragging Hector round the walls of Troy. The

body was gibbeted, and the head placed in an iron cage and sent over to Messina; when it was stuck on the summit of the Zizi palace, where it yet remains, bleached by the dew by night and the sun by day: I saw it three days ago.

"One night, soon after this, a ragged little urchin presented himself in an apartment of the palace, just before the prince retired to rest.

"'Who are you, Messerino?' he asked.

"'Baptistello, the son of old Baptiste Varro.'

"'Ah! and what do you want?' said the prince, looking round him for a whip or cane.

"'My father's head.'

"'Away, you little villain, ere you are tossed out of the window! I would not give it for a thousand scudi.'

"'For two thousand, serenissimo?'

"'Yes, rogue, for so many I might.'

"'On your word of honour?'

"'An impudent little dog! Yes. Away!—when you fetch me such a sum, per Baccho! you shall have your father's head; but not till then.'

"'Enough, excellency; I will redeem it, and keep my word. San Gennaro judge between us, and curse the wretch who fails!'

"'A bold little rogue, and deserves the old villain's head for nothing,' muttered the prince. 'Two thousand scudi! Ah, poor boy! where will he ever get such a sum?'

"The prince soon forgot all about it; but Baptistello, inspired by that intense filial veneration for which our Calabrian youth are so famous, worked incessantly to raise the two thousand scudi—a mighty sum for him; but he did not despair. He dug in the vineyards and rice-fields by day, in the iron-mines of Stilo by night, and begged in cities when he had nothing else to do; and slowly the required sum began to accumulate. When old enough to level the rifle, by his mother's advice, he took to his father's haunts, and turned bandit. Then the gold increased rapidly; and, regularly as he acquired it, he transmitted the ill-gotten ransom to Ser Villani, of St. Eufemio, leaving the gold in the hollow of a certain tree, where the notary found it, and left a full receipt for each amount.

"When the two thousand pieces were numbered, Baptistello presented himself before Villani in the disguise of a Basilian, requesting him to pay Prince St. Agata the money and redeem the bare-bleached skull, which grins so horribly from the battlements of the Palazzo Zizi. They met at the porch of the great church, where the notary had just been hearing mass. He denied ever having received a quattrino of the money: not a single piece had he ever seen—'No, by the miraculous blood of Gennaro!'

"Behold your signed receipts, Master Scrivano.'

"Via! they are forgeries. Away, or I will summon the officers of justice.'

"My two thousand scudi!—my hard-won money, earned at peril of my soul! Return it, thou most infamous of robbers!' cried the infuriated Varro, grasping the notary's throat, and unsheathing his poniard.

"Help, in the name of the Grand Court!' shrieked Villani. Baptistello was arrested, imprisoned in the fearful *Damusi*, and kept there for months; he was then scourged with rods, and thrust forth, naked and bleeding, to perish in the streets, while the money, earned with so much toil and danger, went to enrich the dishonest notary. Baptistello is on the mountains above us; and if Villani falls into his hands this night, Signor Cavaliere, thou mayest imagine the sequel."

The improvisatore ceased, and I saw the keen, twinkling eyes of the notary watching me: he must have heard the whole story, while affecting to sleep, and, trembling violently, he clutched his legal green bag. Suddenly, some one tapped at the casement, and I saw a large, fierce, and grim face peering in.

"Ha!" cried the notary, springing up: "'tis the calesiero returned at last. Thou loitering villain! I will teach you how to respect a member of the grand civil court of Sicily."

He opened the door, and—horror!—instead of the humble and apologizing postilion, there stood the tall, athletic form of Baptistello Varro, clad in his glittering bandit costume. Had the notary encountered thus the great head of his profession, face to face, he could not have been more overwhelmed with dismay: he seemed absolutely to shrink in size before the stern gaze of the formidable robber, whose entrance scarcely less alarmed

the old priest, the poor improvisatore, and myself. But, remembering my former adventures with Varro, I was not without hope of escape. The albergo was crowded with his savage followers, and we were all dragged roughly forth as prisoners. The notary's hired calesso was undergoing a thorough search: the lining was all torn out, and every panel and cushion were pierced and slashed, while the contents of his trunks and mails were scattered in every direction, and flying on the breeze. In his green bag, were found a thousand ducats.

"Villain!" exclaimed Baptistello, as he threw the gold pieces on the sward, "there is more than we would deem sufficient to ransom ten such earth-worms as thee; yet this is but a half of the sum I deposited in the hollow tree at St. Eufemio. I am a robber—true: but I gain my desperate living bravely in the wilderness, by perilling my life hourly; while *thou*, too, art a thief, but of the most despicable and cowardly description—a legalized plunderer of widows and orphans—a vampire, who preys on the very vitals of the community—a smooth-faced masterpiece of villany: in short, wretch, thou art a notary. Remember the ransom of my father's head—the dungeons—the chains, and the scourge. Ha! remember, too, that thou art alone with me on the wild mountains of Calabria; so, kneel to the God above us, for the last sands of thy life are ebbing fast." And he dashed him to the earth.

"O signor—O excellency—mercy!" craved the notary, grovelling in the dust; but the fierce robber only grinned, showing his pearl-white teeth, as, leaning on his rifle, he surveyed him with an air of triumphant malice and supreme contempt. "Mercy! I implore you, by the blood of Gennaro the blessed! Mercy, as you hope for it at your dying day. I will repay the money. I will no longer be a notary, but an honest man."

"Wretch! such mercy will be given as tigers give," cried the ferocious Baptistello, spurning the poor man with his foot, and holding aloft his crucifix. "By this holy symbol of our salvation, I have sworn that thy head shall pay the forfeit for my father's." The brigand kissed it. Though all hope died away in the heart of the notary, he still poured forth a jargon of alternate prayers, threats, and entreaties: his agony was terrible, for, at that moment,

forty years of the "sharpest practice" were about to be accounted for.

"God! I dare not address myself to thee. O, holy father, pray for me in this great peril!" he cried, to the old monk of St. Christiana. "Supplicate Him for a sinner, that has forgotten how to pray for himself."

"Buono!" said Baptistello, "let the priest pray while the notary swings."

Lancelloti approached, and surveyed me with an insolent leer: he held a rope—the reins of the lawyer's mules; in a moment it was looped round the notary's neck, and the other end thrown over the arm of a beech-tree. The monk, kneeling on the sod, prayed with fervour—increased, probably, by anxiety for himself. The struggles of the poor wretch were horrible to behold: overcome with the terror of death, he fought like a wild beast, scratching, biting, and howling; but, in the strong grasp of his powerful destroyers, his efforts were like those of an infant. In a minute, he swung from the branch of the beech, while, with a stern smile of grim satisfaction, the robber watched the plunges of his victim, writhing in the death-agony—the sharp, withered features growing ghastly, as the pale light of the dawning day fell on their distorted lines. But enough.

"Signor Canonico," said Varro, "you may go; the mountains are before you—we meddle not with monks." The priest retired instantly, without bestowing a thought on his companions in trouble. "And who are you, signor, with the mandolin?" continued Baptistello.

"An improvisatore, from Sicily last, excellency," replied the lad, doffing his hat with all humility; "I have come to rouse my countrymen, by the song and guitar, to battle against the legions of Massena, as they did of old against the Saracen and Goth. I am but a poor lad, and have no ransom to offer, save a song of the glorious Marco Sciarra; not a paola can I give your excellencies: my sole inheritance is this guitar, which my father gave me with his dying hand (for he, too, was an improvisatore), when he fell in battle, under the banner of Cardinal Ruffo."

"Where, boy?"

"On the plains of Apulia: I was a little child then," said the lad, shedding tears. "See, the mandolin is stained with his blood."

"Benissimo!" exclaimed the band, who crowded round us.

"Thou, too, art free, for we war not with the poor. Away! follow the monk, and the Virgin speed thee." But the minstrel bestowed an anxious glance on me, and drew near, scorning to imitate the selfish priest, who had now disappeared from the path, which wound over the brightening mountains.

"Your name, signor?" asked Varro, surveying me with a glance of surprise, and seeming puzzled what to think of me.

"Dundas, captain in the British service, and commandant of Scylla," I replied, with haughty brevity.

"The friend of Castelfermo, and who so bravely avenged his death on the renegade Navarro—is it not so?"

"The same, Signor Capo: for two days past, I have undergone great misery, and last night made a most miraculous escape from the troops of General Regnier."

"Who has offered a hundred gold Napoleons for you, dead or alive: a sum quite sufficient to excite the avarice and cupidity of a Calabrian outlaw."

My spirit sank—I made no reply, but cursed the French general in my heart.

"Courage, signor," said Baptistello, laying his hand familiarly on my shoulder; "think not so hardly of us: we all love the British soldiers, and would not yield you to Regnier for all the gold in France. We have not forgotten Maida—eh, comrades?"

"Viva il Re d'Inghilterra!" answered the band, with one voice. (It was the cry of the loyalists, as often as "Viva Ferdinando IV.")

"You hear the sentiments of my followers," said Varro; "truly, signor, as the husband of the Signora d'Alfieri, your name is dear to the whole Calabrians, and I believe the wildest rogue in these provinces would not touch a hair of your head. *Corpo di Baccho!* you must breakfast with us among the mountains: we trust to your honour for not revealing our fastness to our disadvantage—to our own hands for avenging it, if you do. Enough, signor! we know each other."

I was in the hands of men with whom it would have been rash to trifle, and, accepting the rough invitation, I accompanied them across the hills. The sun rose above

the highest peak of Bova, and poured its fiery lustre into the dark-green valleys, gilding the convent vanes and little spires of St. Christiana and Oppido, and exhaling the mist from the black glittering rocks, the sable pines, and verdant slopes of the Apennines.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE BANDIT'S CAVERN.—RECAPTURE AND DELIVERANCE.

THROUGH a long, deep gorge, winding between basaltic cliffs, the production of volcanic fire, or formed by some great convulsion which had rent the massive hills, we scrambled along for nearly half a mile; at the end, rose a wall of rock, on ascending which, by means of a ladder, I found myself in the den of the banditti. The ladder being drawn up when the last man ascended, all communication with the chasm below was thus cut off.

A fire burned brightly in a recess of the cavern, revealing its ghastly rocks and hollow depths, the long stalactites, the crystals, and various sparkling stones which glimmered in the flames as they shot upward through the cranny that served for a chimney. Several females, grouped round it, were engaged in chatting, quarrelling, and cooking; and their picturesque costumes, olive complexions, and graceful figures, were brought forward in strong warm light, by the flickering flames: some had still the sad remains of beauty, and their Greco-Italian features still wore the soft, Madonna-like expression of the southern provinces, though, alas! their innocence had fled; others were sullen, forbidding, or melancholy, and all were laden with tawdry finery and massive jewels.

The aspect of the cavern—one part glaring with lurid light, the other half involved in gloom, where its mysterious recesses pierced into the bowels of the mountain; the women, with their full bosoms, large black eyes, and sandalled feet, their glossy hair braided into tails, or flowing in dishevelled ringlets; the bearded banditti, some in their well-known costume, others in a garb of rough skins, showing their bare legs and arms—their rules, knives, pistols, and horns, sparkling when they

moved—formed a striking scene. Looking outward, also, a view of the distant sea, the smoke of Stromboli piercing the infinity of space above it, the spire of Fiumara, the vine-clad ruins of a Grecian temple, and the long, bright river that wound between the hills towards it, formed a subject for the pencil, such as would have raised the enthusiasm of Salvator Rosa, who, in pursuit of the savagely romantic, sojourned for a time among the wilds, the beauties, the terrors, and the banditti of Calabria.

Chocolate, kid's flesh stewed, eggs, milk, dried grapes, and wine, composed the repast: when it was finished, the poor improvisatore, though not quite at ease, found himself compelled to sing, and chose for his theme MARCO SCIARRA, the glory of the Abruzzesi, whose fame and memory the honest man and the bandit alike extol. He sang in *ottava rima*, and tinkled an accompaniment with his guitar, while every ear listened intently.

The scene opened in the wilds of Abruzzi; Marco was at the head of his thousand followers, and in all the plenitude of his power and terror—that chivalric brigandism which gained him the title of Re della Campagna; then we were told how, kneeling by the wayside, he kissed the hand of Tasso, and did homage to the muse; how successfully he warred with Clement VII. and the count of Conversano, and then fought the battles of the Venetians against their Tuscan enemies; of his bravery, his loves, his compassion, and countless escapes, we all heard in succession, down to that hour when, in the marches of Ancona, he met Battimello, his former friend, who, while embracing him, in the true spirit of Italian treachery, struck a dagger in his heart, and sold his head to a papal commissary.

Every eye flashed as the minstrel concluded; a groan of rage, mingled with a burst of applause, shook the vaulted cavern, for the theme was one well calculated to interest his hearers deeply, and one very pretty young woman threw her arms around the improvisatore, and kissed him on both cheeks. While all were thus well pleased, we took our departure, and were very glad when the cavern and its inmates were some miles behind us. On bidding adieu to Baptistello, I promised to have his father's head sent from Messina, if I lived to reach that

city in safety. He kissed my hand, and a dark smile lit up the features of Lancelloti: I was too soon to learn the ideas passing in the mind of that abominable traitor.

There is, generally, a romance about the Italian outlaw, which raises his character far above that of the mere pickpocket or housebreaker. The danger encountered in the course of his desperate profession, and the wild scenery around him, were all calculated to inspire him with a tinge of heroism: *were*, I say, for the real Italian brigand may now, happily, be classed with the things which are past. Without being guilty of any premeditated crime, many were forced upon that terrible career by the French invasion, or by too freely using their knives in those outbursts of anger and revenge to which the hot blood of the southern climes is so prone; but to some good feelings lingering in those hearts, which danger and despair had not completely hardened, I owed my safety in these various encounters with the wild bravos of Calabria.

But the most dangerous was yet to come. The reward offered by Regnier for my recapture had excited the avarice of Lancelloti, who was then tracking me over the hills, intent on my destruction. On parting with the improvisatore, close by where the poor notary yet hung, with the wild birds screaming round him, I continued my way, as warily as possible, to avoid the enemy; for a continual pop—pop—popping in the distance, and the appearance of white smoke curling on the mountain sides and from the leafless, though budding, forests, announced that the French advanced parties were skirmishing with the brigands and armed *paesani*, and kept me continually on the alert. Dread of the effect of Regnier's reward compelled me to avoid every man I met; so my route soon became equally toilsome and devious. Yet, though exhausted by travelling and loss of sleep, I was animated by a view of Seylla's distant towers and terraces, which rose above the woodlands gleaming in the rays of the joyous sun, and continued to press forward, until, completely overcome with fatigue, I threw myself on the green sward, under the cool shade of a pine thicket, and fell into a deep sleep.

This happy slumber, which, after a long march under

the scorching heat of noon, the cool shade rendered so refreshing, had lasted, perhaps, an hour, when I was roughly roused by the smart application of a rifle-butt to the side of my head. Starting up, I found myself in the grasp of Lancelloti and two others of Varro's band: alas! weary and unarmed, what resistance could I offer? They were strong, fresh, and armed to the teeth; solitude was around us, and no aid near: every hope of escape vanished.

"Via, Signor Inglese," said one; "did you mean to sleep there all day?"

"Béard of Mahomet!" said Lancelloti, with a scowl; "you had better make use of your legs."

"Your purpose, scoundrels?"

"To deliver you to the French commandant at Fiumara," replied the *ci-devant* priest and pirate. "Madonna! a hundred pieces of gold are not to be despised. Look you, signor; I swear by the light of Heaven to blow your brains out on the first attempt to escape!—so fill the foreyard—maladetto! Remember, I am Osman Carora—ha! ha!"

"Wretch! would you murder me in cold blood, and thus add to the guilt accumulated on your unhappy head?"

"Cospetto! it is indeed mighty," said he, gloomily; "yea, enough to darken the stone of Caaba, which was once white as milk, but now, blackened by the sins of men, is like a piece of charcoal in those walls where Abraham built it. When a devout Turk, I—via! on—or a brace of balls will whistle through the head you may wish should reach Fiumara on your shoulders—ha, ha!"

To resist was to die; so, relying on the humanity of the French officer commanding the outposts, I accompanied them, in indescribable agony of mind. The fading rays of the setting sun, as it sank behind the hills, were reddening the massive towers and crenellated battlements, the terraced streets and shining casements of Scylla. It vanished behind the green ridges; the standard descended from the keep, and my heart sank as we neared Fiumara. My escort kept close by me, with their rifles loaded. A river, the name of which I do not remember, winds from these hills towards Fiumara; and we moved along its northern bank. Its deep, smooth current lay on the left side of the

narrow path, and precipitous rocks, like a wall, rose up on the right; so that I was without the slightest hope of effecting an escape. I spoke of the greater reward they would receive on conducting me to Scylla: but they laughed my words to scorn. The French out-piquets were now in sight; and, far down the valley, we saw their chain of advanced sentinels, motionless on their posts, standing with ordered arms, watching the still current of the glassy river, as it swept onwards to the sea: its bright surface reflected the steep rocks, the green woods, and a ruined bridge, so vividly, that the eye could not distinguish where land and water met. The last flush of day, as it died away over the Apennines, cast a yellow blaze on its windings; which at intervals were dotted by the fitful watch-fires of the out-lying piquets.

A party of armed men had been seen by Lancelloti pursuing the turnings of the path we trod. They came towards us. Their conical hats and long rifles announced them Calabrians, and a consultation was held by my capturers whether to advance or retire, as it was quite impossible to leave the path on either hand.

"Go to the front, Gaetano, and reconnoitre," said Lancelloti; "they may be some of the Free Corps." My heart leaped at the idea.

"Cospetto! and if they are?"

"We shoot *him* through the head, plunge into the river, and swim for it!" said the other ruffian.

"Blockhead!" exclaimed Lancelloti, "they are out four, and the first lucky fire may make us more than equal. To *you*," addressing me with cruel ferocity, "I swear, by all the devils, you shall be shot the instant we are attacked—shot, I say, and flung into the river, that no one else may win those bright Napoleons which I hoped should clink in my own pouch."

At that moment, Gaetano came running back to say, that, although armed like the Free Calabri, with white cross-belts and heavy muskets, they wore no uniform or scarlet cockade.

"They must be free cavalieri of our own order, then," exclaimed Lancelloti. "Some of Scarolla's band, perhaps."

"They have been plundering of late, as far as Capo Pillari."

"Forward, then!"

Life and liberty were hanging by a hair. My heart beat tumultuously, and mechanically I moved forward, cursing the unsoldier-like malice of the French leader, who had placed me in such a position, by exciting the avarice of such wretches. After losing sight of the advancing party for a time, we suddenly met them, front to front, at an abrupt angle where the road turned round a point of rock.

"Advance first, Signor Inglese," said Lancelloti, "and, should you attempt to escape, remember!" and, tapping the butt of his rifle, he grinned savagely as I stepped forward, expecting every instant to be shot through the head. My brain was whirling—I was giddy with rage and despair. The path diminished to a narrow shelf of rock, about a foot broad. On one side, it descended sheer to the dark waters of the deep and placid river; on the other, frowned the wall of basalt; and I was compelled to grasp the tufts of weeds and grass on its surface, as I passed the perilous turn.

Scarcely had I cleared the angle, when I was confronted by—whom!—Giacomo, *Lucca labbruta*, and two other soldiers of Santugo in disguise. Their shout of joy was answered by a volley from three rifles behind me; and the report rang like thunder among the cliffs.

I heard the balls whistle past; a shriek and a plunge followed, as one of the Free Corps fell, wounded, into the stream. His comrades rushed on, to avenge him, and I drew aside behind an angle of the rocks, to avoid the cross fire of both parties. Enraged to behold the husband of their famous "*Signora Capitanessa*" in such a plight, Giacomo and his comrades pressed furiously forward with fixed bayonets. To this formidable weapon, the foe could only oppose the clubbed rifle, and a desperate conflict ensued. But on such ground it could not be of long duration. Blubber-lipped Lucca shot Lancelloti through the breast: he rolled down the steep rocks into the sluggish stream, above which his ferocious face rose once or twice amid the crimson eddies of his blood, then sank, to rise no more. Immediately after, his companions were bayoneted, and flung over the precipice after him.

Full of triumph at his victory and discovery, honest Giacomo skipped about on the very edge of the cliff, dancing the tarantella like a madman.

"Thrice blessed be our holy lady of Oppido, who led us this way to-night. O, happiness! O, joy to the capitaneessa!" he exclaimed. "Ah, signor! you know not what she has endured. The whole garrison has been turned upside down. The Signora Bianca is distracted; the visconte, the Conte di Palmi, and Signor Olivero Lascelles have been incessantly beating the woods in search of you, so far as they dared venture. And Giacomo—O, triumph!—is the finder! It is an era in my life. Annina herself dare not be coy after this!"

Giacomo's Italian enthusiasm displayed itself in a thousand antics; and it was not until we saw a party of the French tirailleurs (whom the firing had alarmed) advancing up the opposite bank to reconnoitre, that we prepared to retire. It was now night: favoured by the moon, we forded the river at a convenient place, and, taking our way through the woods between Fiumara and Scylla, we eluded the vigilance of the French piquets. In an hour, I found myself safe within the walls, gates, and gun-batteries of my garrison, where my sudden return caused a burst of universal joy.

Breaking away from Luigi, my brother-officers and soldiers, who crowded clamorously round me, I hurried to the apartments of Bianca. All was silent when I entered, and the flickering rays of a night-lamp revealed to me the confusion my absence had created. Bianca's music, her guitar, her daily work, the embroidery, her books and drawings, lay all forgotten, and, huddled in a corner, poor papagallo croaked desolately in his cage: for he, too, had been deserted, and his seed-box was empty. A row of vases, which Bianca used to tend every day, had been forgotten, and the flowers had drooped and withered. The whole sleeping-chamber wore an air of disorder and neglect: her bed appeared not to have been slept in since I had left; for my scarlet sash lay on it, just where I had thrown it the night I left Scylla.

Above all, I was shocked with the appearance of the poor girl. Reclining on a sofa, she lay sleeping on the bosom of Annina; who also was buried in a heavy slumber: both were evidently wearied with watching and sorrow. Bianca was pale as death. Her beautiful hair streamed in disorder over her white neck and polished shoulder; and shining tears were oozing from her long

dark lashes. She was weeping in her sleep, and the pallor of her angelic beauty was rendered yet stronger by comparison with the olive brow and rosy cheeks of the waiting-maid.

I was deeply moved on beholding her thus : but I never felt so supremely happy as at the moment, when, gently putting my arm round her, I awoke her to joy, and dispelled those visions of sorrow which floated through her dreams.

CHAPTER LXV.

JOYS OF A MILITARY HONEYMOON.

EARLY next morning, I was roused by the sharp blast of a French trumpet stirring all the echoes of Scylla. I was dressing hastily, when Lascelles, who commanded the barrier-guard, entered, saying that a flag of truce, and a trumpet, sent by General Regnier, required a conference with the commandant.

"Curse Regnier," said I testily, while dragging on my boots; "I will not hold any communication with him, after the scandalous manner in which he has treated me."

"But you may receive the officer, and hear that which he is ordered to communicate; at least, answer this letter, of which he is the bearer."

By the grey twilight of a February morning, I opened the Frenchman's despatch, and read :—

"SUMMONS

Of unconditional capitulation, and the articles thereof, agreed to between the commandant of Scylla and Monsieur le Général de Division, Regnier, Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, Knight-Commander of the Iron Crown of Lombardy, Grand Cross of the Lion of Bavaria, Knight of St. Louis of France, Chef de Bataillon of the Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard," &c. &c. &c.

"Bah!" cried Oliver, with a laugh, "throw it over the window."

"Give Monsieur le Général, Knight of St. Louis, and all that, my compliments, and say, I will return these articles with the first cannon-ball fired on his trenches."

"The enemy are close at hand this morning, and appear to have made great progress during the night."

"Desire the officer commanding the artillery, to have all the heavy guns loaded with tincase-shot, in addition to iron balls; and to have the primings well looked to."

"But the Frenchman—he is still waiting at the barriers—shall I show him up?"

"You may—I have a particular message to his general."

"He is a punchy, ungentlemanly kind of man, and appears to keep a sharp eye about him, evidently observing all our defences."

"Lodge the trumpeter in the main-guard, and bind up the eyes of the officer; they served me so once; I will meet him in the old hall."

That I might not be deficient in courtesy, I directed wine, decanters, &c., to be conveyed to the vaulted hall, where princely banners and Italian trophies had given place to racks of arms, iron-bound chests, and military stores. Oliver led in the officer, with his eyes covered by a handkerchief, which gave him rather a droll aspect. He was a short, thick-set man, with wiry, grey moustaches, and wore the uniform of the ill-fated voltigeurs of the 23rd regiment.

"Monsieur, you will no doubt pardon this necessary muffing," said I, advancing; "but as you wished to see me—ha!"—at that moment Oliver withdrew the bandage, when lo! imagine my astonishment on seeing the features of General Regnier! I knew him in an instant, although, instead of the blue coat and gold oak-leaves, the stars and medals of the general of the empire, he wore the plain light green and silver braid of the 23rd. His wonder was not less on recognizing me.

"Ouf! you have outflanked me—quite!" said he, bowing with a ludicrous air of confusion and assurance.

"Shame! shame, general!" I replied, with an air of scorn; "who is the spy, and deserves to be hanged or shot?"

"Not I," said he, with *sang froid*; "I am the bearer of a flag of truce."

"In your *own* name? Good!"

"No; in that of Joseph I., king of Naples, and the marshal prince of Essling."

"A paltry pretence, under which you came hither to reconnoitre our works, our cannon, and means of resistance. Away, sir! Back to your position, and remember that one consideration alone prevents me from horse-whipping you as you deserve, for the manner in which you treated me at Seminara."

"Horsewhip—*mille baionettes!*" replied he, with eyes flashing fire; "I must have reparation for that; monsieur, be so good as to recall those words."

"Sir, remember your threats and the fetters."

"Ouf!" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. "I am in the lion's den. You must meet me, monsieur."

"Yes, in the breach — sword in hand — begone, sir!"

"I go; but hear me. Remember the fate of the Italian commandant of Crotona. I swear, by God and the glory of France, that, like him, you shall die, and hang from these ramparts when the place surrenders. Our heavy gun-batteries will open at noon; you have but two hundred rank and file; for every one of these I can bring one piece of cannon, and a hundred soldiers — ouf! we shall eat you up. Before the sun sets to-night, my triumph shall be complete, and Calabria once more the emperor's."

And thus we parted, with the bitterest personal animosity. He retired with the bewildered Lascelles, who led him, blindfold, to the outer barrier, and, with his trumpeter, there dismissed him.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed, when he hurried back to me, "what a triumph it would have been to have sent the old fox over to Messina! Only think of Sherbrooke's flaming general order and address of thanks on the occasion. What on earth tempted you to let him go?"

"Flags of truce must be respected; but I had a hard struggle between etiquette and inclination. Desire the gunners of the guard to telegraph to the *Electra* and gun-boats, to keep close in shore, and send my orderly to the Visconte di Santugo, saying I will visit him shortly."

The continual skirmishing of the peasantry and banditti with the French, had greatly retarded the operations of the latter: but on the 10th of February,—the infantry brigade of Milette's corps having descended from the Milia heights, and come within range of our cannon,—it became imperative to order off to Sicily the whole of the armed paesani who occupied the town of Scylla, as the bombarding operations of the besieging army would only subject them to destruction. While our batteries kept in check the soldiers of Milette, I superintended the embarkation of these brave fellows, and the remnant of Santugo's Free Corps, who were all received on board the Sicilian gun-boats, at the sea staircase. The visconte remained with me; but his volunteers, who afterwards distinguished themselves so much in our service, were quartered in Messina. Poor Giacomo was afterwards slain in the brilliant attack made by General Macfarlane, on the coast of Naples, in the July following. The Cavaliere Paolo, for his bravery on the same day, at the capture of the Castello d'Ischia, received the thanks of Ferdinand IV. and Sir J. Stuart, at the head of the army. He was afterwards created Conte Casteluccio, and shared his coronet with the fair widow of Castagno. He is now senior commandant of the Yäger guards, in the Neapolitan army.

I transmitted with the gun-boats the whole of the sick and wounded, and everything of value. I sent away my groom with my gallant grey, which was indeed far too good a nag to be captured and ridden by Frenchmen.

It was in vain that I entreated Bianca to go in safety with the boats, and described to her all the horrors of a siege; the noise of our guns playing on Milette's advancing column only confirmed the fond girl's determination to remain with us; and she seemed happy when the last gun-boat, laden to the water's edge with her countrymen, moved slowly away from the shore, and the only chance by which she could leave me was cut off for ever.

A safe place was fitted up for her by the soldiers in a bomb-proof chamber, where the thick walls and arches of solid masonry shut out the storm of war, which was soon to shake the towers of Scylla to their deepest foundations. The barriers of palisade were secured, the bridges drawn up, the standard hoisted, the guns double shotted with

balls, canister, and grape, the breastworks and ramparts lined, the locks and flints examined; and thus we awaited the enemy on the forenoon of the 10th; the roll of their brass drums rang among the hills, as the successive columns descended from the heights of Milia, taking the most circuitous routes, to avoid the fire of our cannon, which played upon their line of march at every opportunity afforded by the inequality of the ground.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE SIEGE OF SCYLLA.

My mind was a prey to the utmost anxiety, when I beheld the overwhelming masses which Regnier was pouring forward on the last solitary hold of Ferdinand, cut off by the stormy Strait of Messina from all Sicilian succour. A strong brigade of cavalry, the 23rd light infantry, the 1st, 62nd, and 101st regiments of the French line, together with a powerful battering-train, formed his force; but, as each corps consisted of three battalions, he mustered more than 6,000 foot alone. The "handful" of the British 62nd, amounting now to only 200 file, were to encounter them: but proud of my corps, and feeling all the glorious ardour of my profession glowing within me—relying on the indomitable English spirit of my soldiers, and the great natural strength of the position we occupied—I did not despair of at least protracting a siege, which, when the great disparity of numbers is remembered, must be deemed as glorious a deed of arms as our military annals exhibit.

On the morning of the 11th February, five 24-pounders, five 18-pounders, four mortars, and innumerable field-pieces, opened a tremendous cannonade on the keep and upper works of Scylla, to demolish our cover, and bury us with our guns under the ruins. This battering continued daily, without a moment's cessation, until the 14th; when, covered by it, the French sappers and artillerists formed two other breaching batteries, at two hundred yards' distance from our bastions, notwithstanding the appalling slaughter made among them by our shells bursting, and

grape-shot and musketry showering around, with deadly effect. Though the whole of Regnier's infantry remained under cover during these operations, the execution done on those who worked at the breaching batteries must have been fearful—they were so close and so numerous. My own brave little band was becoming thin from the fire from the heights—every cannon-shot which struck the stone walls was rendered, in effect, as dangerous as a shell, by the heavy splinters it cast on every side, and I foresaw that the castle of Ruffo—mouldering with the lapse of years, and shaken by the storms and earthquakes of centuries, would soon sink before the overwhelming tempest of iron balls which Regnier hurled against it from every point—his gunners stopping only until their cannon became cool enough to renew the attack. We had expected great assistance from our flotilla of gun-boats, which, by keeping close in shore, might have cannonaded the enemy's position, and shelled their approaches; but a storm of wind and rain, which continued without cessation or lull, from the time the attack began until it was ended, rendered an approach to Scylla impossible: the sea was dashing against it in mountains of misty foam, and on its walls of rock would have cast a line-of-battle ship like a cork.

The roar of the musketry, and the perpetual booming of the adverse battery-guns, produced a tremendous effect; awakening all the echoes of the fathomless caves of Scylla in the splintered cliffs and Mont Jaci, and, after being tossed from peak to peak of the Milia Hills, with ten thousand reverberations, all varying, the reports died away in the distant sky—only to be succeeded by others. The dense volumes of smoke that rose from the French batteries, were forced upwards and downwards by the stormy wind, and rolled away over land and sea, twisted into a thousand fantastic shapes, mingling on one side with the mist of the valleys, on the other, with the foam of the ocean. The continual rolling of the French brass drums, the clamour of their artillerymen, and the wild hallooing of their infantry, added to the roar of the conflict above and that of the surge below, increased the effect of a scene which had as many beauties as terrors.

The night of the 14th was unusually dark and stormy, and on visiting Bianca in her dreary vault (which, by

being below the basement of the keep, was the only safe place in the castle), she told me, with a pale cheek and faltering tongue, that often, of late, she had been disturbed by sounds rising from the earth below her. I endeavoured to laugh away her fears; but, on listening, I heard distinctly the peculiar noise of hammers and shovels, which convinced me that the French sappers were at work somewhere, and that the hollows of the rock had enabled them to penetrate far under the foundations of the castle. On examination, we found that for three nights they had been lodging a mine, during the noise and gloom of the storm, and had excavated two chambers: one, under our principal bastion; the other, under the keep—connecting them by a *saucisson*, led through a gallery cut in the solid rock—the effect of such an explosion would have ended the siege at once, and blown to atoms the vault appropriated to Bianca and her servant. My mind shrank with horror from contemplating the frightful death she had so narrowly escaped. Next night, the train would, undoubtedly, have been fired; and the inner chamber was pierced within three feet of her bed! * * *

Desiring Lascelles to prepare a counter-mine, in case of our failure, I slipped out by the barriers, accompanied by Santugo and twelve volunteers. Favoured by the darkness of the night, the howling of the stormy wind, and dashing of the "angry surge," we stole safely to the scene of operations, and with charged bayonets fell upon a brigade of sappeurs—as the French style a party of eight private artificers, under the command of a non-commissioned officer. They were all as merry as crickets, talking and laughing whilst working in their shirt sleeves.

They defended themselves bravely with their swords; but, as we possessed the mouth of the excavation, all retreat was cut off. The corporal, a strong athletic fellow, beat down Santugo's guard with a shovel, and striking him to the earth with the same homely weapon, broke through us, plunged down the rocks, and escaped; but the whole of his party were bayoneted, and, after utterly ruining and destroying the mine, we retreated within our gates, without losing a man, or firing a shot. The exasperation of the proud Santugo at the rough knock-down he received from the corporal is quite indescribable.

Next day the enemy pushed forward still closer to the

walls ; led by my old acquaintance, De Bourmont, the 101st regiment had the temerity to advance round an angle of the rocks to the water's edge, for the purpose of destroying the sea staircase—our last, our only means of retreat. A cry burst from my soldiers ; we brought every musket to bear upon that point, and depressed our cannon by wedges and handspikes ; section after section of the enemy were swept into the sea, and they were therefore compelled to abandon the attempt, leaving half their number piled up on the rocky shore, killed or wounded, or drowned by falling from the narrow path, where many of the dead and dying were drenched, and swept away every instant by the sea.

As the mist rolled up from the mountains, we saw the shattered remains of the regiment—a dark mass, in grey great-coats, with the tops of their glazed caps and bayonet-blades glancing in the sun—retiring, double quick, beyond the eminence, which, to a certain extent, sheltered Regnier's infantry from our missiles ; but their retreat was galled by them, and a line of prostrate bodies marked their route.

"Dundas, you shall see how I will unhorse that fellow," said the officer commanding our artillery, as he coolly adjusted the quoin under the breach of a long nine. He meant old Bourmont, who, like a brave fellow as he was, retreated in rear of his column, and was jogging along on his charger, whose drooping head, mulish ears, curved face, and shambling action, showed the thorough French horse. Before I could speak, the match fell on the vent, the gun was fired, and the aim was true—fatally so.

"A splendid shot, and a jewel of a gun," exclaimed my friend, exulting in his gunnery, as both horse and rider tumbled prone to the earth. "Will you try a shot, Dundas?"

"Thank you, no ; you have killed the only man, amid all those ranks, I would have spared."

"By Jove ! he is not settled yet," said Lascelles, with an air of disappointment, as the colonel disengaged himself from his fallen horse, and, heavily encumbered by his jack-boots, scrambled over the hill with as much expedition as his short legs and rotund form would permit. Both Oliver and the artillerist were chagrined at his escape ;

and yet, in their quiet moods, both were men who would not have killed a fly.

At that moment, so critical to Bourmont, I heard a splitting roar—the rock shook beneath us, and we knew not which way to look. Shaken and rent by the salvos of heavy shot, which, for four successive days, had showered from the French batteries, an immense mass of wall, the curtain of our strongest bastion, rolled thundering to the earth, burying the poor artillery officer, Gascoigne, Serjeant Gask, a number of soldiers, and all our best cannon, under a mighty mountain of crumbled masonry. I was dismayed and grieved by this terrible catastrophe, which the French hailed with shouts of rapture and triumph; they redoubled their battering, with such effect on the shattered walls, that every time a ball struck, other masses gave way, burying soldiers and cannon beneath them. By sunset, every gun was entombed under the prostrate walls, and we had only musketry to trust to, in case of an assault, which I had no doubt would be attempted that very night, as the breach was quite practicable, and the continual cannonade prevented us from repairing it by fascines, or any other contrivance.

Some were now despairing, and all more or less dispirited; many an anxious glance was cast to Sicily, and to the sea which raged between us, as the lowering yellow sun sank behind the Neptunian hills, and the waves grew black and frothy.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE FALL OF SCYLLA.—CONCLUSION.

NIGHT descended upon Scylla, upon the dark Apennines and the tempestuous sea, and my mind became filled with anxiety; our means of defence were greatly diminished, our shelter ruined. The stormy state of the weather cut off, equally, all hope of succour or escape, and I anticipated with dread a surrender to General Regnier, my personal enemy; by his orders, Santugo had little mercy to expect from Napoleon; and I knew not to what

indignities Bianca, as an Italian lady, might be subjected, if taken prisoner. Though crippled in means of resistance, and reduced in number, my few brave fellows would have defended the ruined breach till the last of them perished, but I saw that, ultimately, Scylla *must* become the prize of the enemy, and only trusted that, during a lull of the storm, we might effect a retreat to Messina by the flotilla of Sicilian gun-boats.

How changed now was the aspect of the venerable Scylla, since that morning when the French batteries first opened on it! The massive Norman battlements and its beautiful hall had crumbled into rubbish, or sunk in ponderous masses beneath the heavy salvos; every window and loophole was beaten into hideous gaps, and yawning rents split the strong towers from rampart to foundation. The well was choked up by the falling stones, and want of water increased the miseries of sixty wounded men, whom, ultimately, we had to abandon to the care of the enemy. Every cannon was buried, under the mighty piles of ruin, beyond recovery—all, save one thirteen-inch mortar, which I ordered to be dragged to the summit of the breach, where it afterwards did good service.

Many of the miserable wounded were destroyed under the falling walls, or buried, more or less, at a time when we could not spare a hand to extricate them; their cries were piteous, and their agonies frightful. The dead lay heaped up behind breastwork and banquette, and from the castle gutters the red blood was dropping on the sea-beaten rocks below, where the sea-mews and cormorants flapped their wings, and screamed over the sweltering corpses of the 101st. The artillerymen were almost annihilated, and their platforms were drenched in gore.

Though exhausted by the toil they had endured, the brave little band of survivors manned the breach, and remained under arms during the whole of a most tempestuous night, with that quiet cheerfulness, mingled with stern determination, which are the principal characteristics of our unmatched soldiery in times of peril. Towards midnight, Santugo (whom, with Lascelles, I had left in charge of the breach) aroused me from a nap I was snatching, rolled up in my cloak and ensconced under the lee side of a parapet.

"Signor, we have had an alert," said he, "a movement

is taking place amongst the enemy. They will be in the breach in five minutes."

I hurried to the mighty rent in our fortifications, and saw the long and perilous route which an escalade had to ascend—a steep and uncertain pathway, jagged with rocks and covered with a thousand cart-loads of loose stones, mortar, and rubbish. It looked like a waterfall, as it vanished down the rocks into the gloom and obscurity below. The sky was intensely dark, and, though the wind howled, and the sea hissed and roared on the bluff headlands, the night seemed calm and still, after the battle-din of the past day.

A white mass, like a rolling cloud, was moving softly towards the breach, and Santugo was puzzled to account for the strange uniform; but I knew in a moment that it was an attack *en chemise*, and that the stormers were clad each in a white shirt, a garb sometimes adopted by the French when engaged in a night assault. Here our vigilance got the better of them.

The chemise is a short shirt, either with or without sleeves, worn over the accoutrements, reaching only to the flap of the cartridge-box, and is a very useful and necessary precaution, to prevent the stormers from mistaking each other in the darkness, horror, and confusion of a night assault.

Our drum (we had only one now) beat, and a volley of musketry was poured upon the breach from every point that commanded it. The flashes glared forth over the ruined parapets above and the loopholes of the casemates below, while our artillerymen, now that they had no longer cannon to work, stood by the howitzer, to sweep the breach, and showered rockets, hand-grenades, and red and blue lights on the advancing column. The bursting of the former retarded and confused them, while the lurid or ghastly glare of the latter showed us how to direct our fire. Many fire-balls alighted on the rocks, and blazed furiously, shedding over everything floods of alternate crimson and blue light, which had a magnificent yet horrible effect.

"Vive la gloire! Avancez! avancez, mes enfants!" cried the officer who led a wing of the French 62nd, and a wild cheer burst from his soldiers. It was the brave young Vicomte de Chataillon who headed "the Lost Children," and I saw with regret that he must fall.

"Forward the howitzer, to sweep the breach!" cried I to the artillerymen, who were every second falling down, killed or wounded, into the gap, before the fire of the French. "Forward—depress the muzzle, and stand clear of the recoil!"

Loaded with a bag containing a thousand musket-balls, the howitzer was run forward to the breach, over which its yawning muzzle was depressed and pointed.

"Fire!" cried the corporal. A little flame shot upward from the vent, a broad and vivid blaze flashed from the muzzle, and the report shook the ground beneath our feet. The effect of such an unusual and concentrated discharge of musket-shot on the advancing mass was awful and tremendous. By the light of the blazing fire-balls, we saw the sudden carnage in all its sanguinary horror. The dashing Chataillon, and more than two hundred rank and file, were swept away—literally *blown to pieces*—by the storm of leaden balls; and the remainder of his party retired on the main body in undisguised confusion and dismay.

"Well done, soldiers!" I exclaimed, with stern triumph, and feeling a wild glow of excitement, only to be felt in such a place and at such a time. "Ready the handspikes—back with the mortar—load again, and cram her to the muzzle with grape and tin-case shot, to sweep their column again!"

Again the brave French came headlong on, led now by jovial old De Bourmont; who, with the tricolour in one hand and his cocked hat in the other, scrambled up the loose stony breach in his clumsy jack-boots, with an agility astonishing in one of his years and size. The gold cross of the Legion, the silver badges of Lodi, Arcola, of Marengo, and other scenes of honourable service—his bald head and silver hair—shone amid the glaring fireballs and flashing musketry, as the desperate stormers swept on.

"Vive l'empereur! Avancez! Avancez!" cried he.

"*Tué tué!*" yelled the forlorn band; and the whole of Regnier's division sent up the *cri des armes* from the hills to heaven. On came the infuriated *assailants*—on—on—rushing up the frightful path; but the deadly fire we rained upon them, and the fast falling corpses (every bullet killing double) soon kept them thoroughly in check.

Regardless of danger, I stood on the summit of the

breach, that my soldiers might not want example. I felt the *wind* of the flying balls as they whistled past me; one carried away my right epaulette, a second broke the hilt of my sabre, and I lost a spur by a third.

"Soldiers, courage!" cried Santugo, who kept close by my side, and brandished his sabre with hot impatience; "courage, and they must again fly before you! Viva Ferdi—O, Madonna mia!" he suddenly ejaculated, in a gasping voice, as a ball struck him, and he sank at my feet. The soldiers at the howitzer dragged him back from the enemy's fire; and, as they did so, a musket bullet dropped from his left shoulder: he caught it, all dripping as it was with his blood, and, giving it to the corporal, exclaimed, like the soldier of Julian Estrado—"With *this* will I avenge myself! Signor Bombardiere, be so good as to load me a musket, and ram this bullet well home."

It was done in a twinkling; and, while from sheer agony his frame quivered and his teeth were clenched like a vice, he levelled the piece over the wheel of the howitzer, and shot poor De Bourmont, who fell dead, and rolled to the bottom of the rocks. The concussion threw Santugo backwards. But he was again dragged out of the press by the gunners, and taken to a sheltered place, where Macnesia attended to his wound.

The instant Colonel Bourmont fell, another officer snatched the tricolour from the hand of the corpse as it rolled past, and supplied his place; and once more the storming party rushed up the steep ascent, regardless as before of falling men and rolling stones, of the shot showered on them from every point, and the hedge of keen bayonets bristling at the summit of the breach above them.

"Long live Joseph, king of Naples! Tué! Tué! Vive la France!" They were again within a few yards of us, when the stern order, "Forward with the howitzer!" rang above the din. The artillery put their hands and shoulders to the wheels, and urged it to the breach; which was again swept by an irresistible storm of bullets. Once more the carnage was beyond conception horrible; and with a yell of rage and dismay, the stormers retreated precipitately beyond the eminence which sheltered their infantry.

On their flying, the incessant discharge of fire-arms

which had rung for so many hours, died away for a time ; and the rising sun revealed to us the carnage of the last night's conflict. The breach, the rocks, and approaches without the court, parapets and defences within, were covered with blood, and strewn with mangled bodies ; but the ascent of the forlorn hope was terrible—no pencil could depict—no pen can describe it ! The Frenchmen lay in piles of twenty and thirty ; while scattered in every direction were seen the fragments of those who had perished by the discharges of the howitzer.

Taking advantage of the temporary cessation of hostilities, I ordered the breach to be repaired by piles of stones and rubbish, to form a breastwork ; while another fatigue-party cleared away some of the ruins which buried our cannon and platforms. The soldiers raised a faint cheer—one gun was extricated. Alas ! a trunnion was knocked off by the falling stones, and our labour had been in vain—it was useless. On seeing how we were employed, the French drums once more beat the *pas de charge*, and the attack was renewed with greater fury, and on two distant points at once. The 1st, 62nd, and 101st, again advanced to the breach, while a brigade of their second battalions, under General Milette, with ten or twelve field-pieces, assailed us on a point almost opposite ; and the breaching battery, the field-brigade and mortars on the height, poured shot and shell upon us with remorseless determination. During the whole night and morning, the elemental war had continued with such unabated fury, that our gun-boats had been unable to leave the Sicilian coast ; and I became convinced—but with sorrow and chagrin—that a capitulation was inevitable. I was about to order the gallant union to be hauled down, and the white flag of mercy hoisted ; but before doing so, I conveyed a notice by telegraph to General Sherbrooke, in Sicily, acquainting him with my situation and intention.

“ *Fight on—you will be rescued !* ” was the answer we received. Almost immediately, after the storm lulled a little, and we saw the stately *Electra* standing, with her sails crowded, towards Scylla ; while the flotilla, from the Faro, spread their broad latteens to the stormy wind. Animated by the prospect, and filled with desperate courage, once more we manned the deadly breach. Before,

we fought for honour and in the fulfilment of our duty ; now, it was for life and liberty : and most effectually we kept the foe in check, until the gun-boats reached the sea-staircase ; where Captain Trollope, of the *Electra*, with the men-of-war launches, arrived, to superintend the embarkation.

Aware of our intended escape, the enraged enemy did all in their power to frustrate it ; the batteries, the brigades of field-pieces, and the battalions of infantry, poured their utmost fire upon the steep and narrow staircase (which was hewn out of the solid rock), on the ruined breach, the blood-stained ramparts, the corpse-heaped ditches, and the heaving boats : their drums rolled, and their shouts rent the air, while their frantic gunners worked their cannon like madmen.

Now, indeed, came the moment of my greatest dread and anxiety ; to which all the rest had been child's play. Bianca—the poor drooping girl, now half dead with terror and exhaustion—had to be brought forth, with her attendant, and conveyed to the boats : to the boats, good God ! And at that terrible time, when the concentrated fire of such a number of cannon, mortars, and musketry was poured upon Scylla ; and especially on that steep and slippery stair which she had to descend. The 1st Legere, nearly a thousand strong, swept it with their fire. My heart became quite unmanned—I trembled ; but it was for her alone.

“ Oliver ; ” I cried to Lascelles ; “ see Bianca—see Mrs. Dundas to the boats ; it is a duty with which I can hardly trust myself—I have the breach to defend. Look sharp, man ! yet in God's name, I implore you to be wary ! ”

He wrung my hand, sheathed his sword, and withdrew. A minute afterwards, he emerged from the ruined bomb-proof arch ; Bianca leaned on his arm, and a party of soldiers threw themselves in a dense circle around her for her protection.

“ Claude, Claude ! ” she cried, in a despairing voice ; but the faithful band hurried her down to the boats.

“ Sound—close to the centre ! ” cried I to the bugle-boy : “ call off the men from every point ! ”

As he obeyed me, tears fell fast from his eyes : his father, a soldier, lay dead in the breach close by. The bugle-blast was caught, in various cadence, by the wind.

and could be barely heard above the noise of the conflict; the assembly, and the retreat, poured in rapid succession on the ear, and the last shrill note of the warning to retire *double-quick* had scarcely been given, ere the bugle flew from his grasp, and, struck by a shot, the poor boy rolled at my feet, bleeding, and beating the earth. Sixty men, the last remnant of my comrades, assembled from every point. Lloyd spiked the mortar, and the whole rushed, helter-skelter, down the steep staircase, and sprang into the boats, which were pushed off as soon as they were filled.

I was the last to leave the fort, and, as I turned to go, "O, Captain Dundas, don't leave *me*, sir!" cried an imploring voice: it was the little bugler of the 62nd. A score of wounded men were crying the same thing: it was impossible to attend to them all, but, snatching up the boy, I bore him off, and leaped into the launch of the *Electra*, in the stern-sheets of which sat Bianca, rolled up in my regimental cloak, to protect her from the chill morning air and damp sea atmosphere. She sobbed convulsively, with terror and joy. Santugo was in one of the gun-boats—Macnesia sat beside him; Lloyd, Lascelles, and the soldiers, were crowded into other craft, and the whole gave a reckless cheer of defiance.

"Shove off!" cried the captain of the *Electra*, through his speaking-trumpet; "give way, lads—cheerily now!" and the oars dipped in the water as the sails were trimmed, and the sterns were turned to Scylla.

The whole embarkation had been effected with matchless rapidity and order, notwithstanding that the cannon-shot, the bursting shells, the grenades, and musketry, lashed and tore the water into foam around us—the sea, all the while, roaring and rolling in mighty mountains of froth against the cliffs, where it boiled, as if in impotent wrath, recoiling from the slippery and frowning bluff, to run its waves in quick succession into the vast and gloomy Dragara, which has often been compared to the mouth of some wondrous monster essaying to engulf all ocean. One seaman was killed, and ten dangerously wounded; but these casualties were deemed trifling, under so heavy a fire, and when the sea was heaving and breaking beneath us, threatening every instant to swamp the boats, to dash them against each other, or on these inhospitable

rocks, which nearly proved so fatal to the "sacred *Argo*" of old.

With three hearty cheers, we moved off. Scarcely had we done so, when the tricolour waved over Scylla, and the tall red plumes and glancing bayonets of the 101st appeared among the ruined walls, while a party of the 23rd rushed, shouting, down the staircase, with such impetuosity that many fell headlong into the seething sea.

We had done our duty. Though, by force of numbers, they had beaten us out of the last stronghold of Ferdinand IV. and the British in Calabria, they had gained only a pile of shapeless ruin, and at the dear price of many a gallant fellow. We were now on the open ocean—three minutes before, we were manning the frightful breach!

The storm died away, and the bright Ausonian sun arose in his glory: the shores of Sicily, studded with towns and castles, the green woods, the sparkling sandy beach, the bright Neptunian hills, and the red tower of the Lantern, were all radiant with light. The shore we had left, and the blood-stained Scylla, diminished in the distance, as our sailors bent to their flashing oars, and the bellying canvas swelled on the morning wind, which blew from the pine-clad Apennines.

"Courage, Bianca!" I exclaimed, and threw my arm around her; "we are beyond range, even of cannon, now."

"Anima mia," she whispered, as she laid her head on my shoulder, "you are safe, and I am happy!"

And thus ended MY CAMPAIGN IN THE CALABRIAS.

VIZI KSA.

